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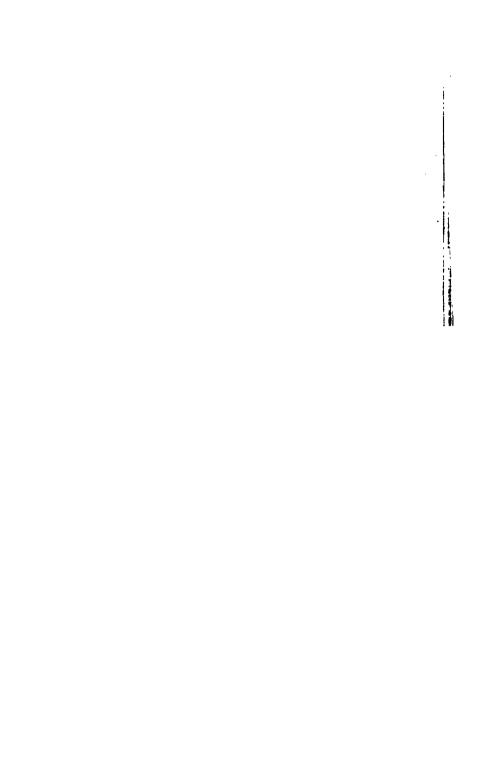






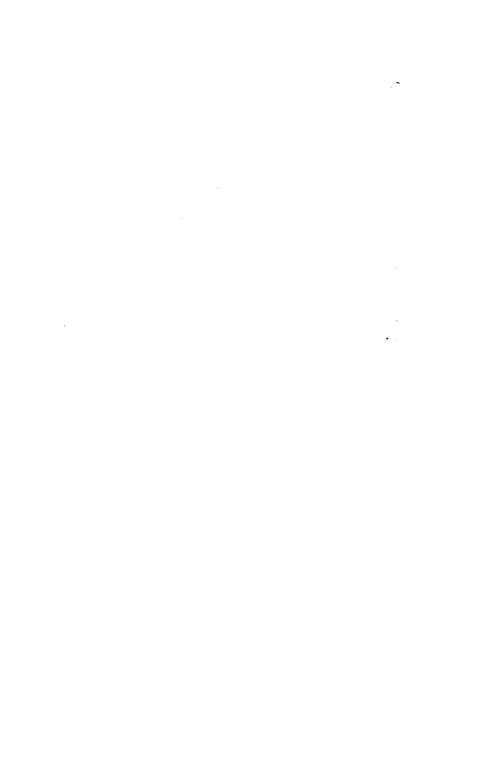


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THE BLOOMING ANGEL WALLACE IRWIN

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THE NEW YORK



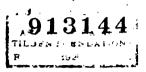
"I-WAS SORT OF THINKING HOW I'D LIKE TO HEAR YOU MAKE A SPEECH OF FOU WERE ANYBODY'S HUSBAND BUT MINE"

THE BLOOMING ANGEL

WALLACE IRWIN

AUTHOR OF "VENUS IN THE EAST," "PILGEIMS INTO FOLLT," "LETTERS OF A JAPANESE SCHOOLBOY," ETC.





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TO FLOSSIE'S ORIGINAL

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By MAY WILSON PRESTON

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THE BLOOMING ANGEL

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THE BLOOMING ANGEL

CHAPTER I

LIFE ON OLYMPUS

As this is but a reporter's record of that hard-contested case, The Immortal Gods vs. The Red Tam-o'-Shanter, it might be simplest to begin near the point of contact between Olympus and a headpiece more disturbing than fair Helen's hank of hair.

In the easy-going babyhood of the twentieth century—I then being an unkempt sophomore—there stood upon the museum of Dyak University four tall, stark ancients, sixteen-footers by actual measurement; and these figures, like many another unattainable ideal, repelled the average imagination and cast a frost upon the youthful passer-by. In the last sunset rays of one lovely California evening this pompous four presided abstractedly over the huddled human scene and, for all I know, focused their blind marble gaze upon a small building in the

outskirts of Dyak, a poor little house loudly labeled Bon Ton Laundry.

The ancient four were, as you have by now guessed, statues; but he who was at that moment putting a finishing touch on his shave somewhere behind the Bon Ton sign was quiveringly human. The statues were supposed to be of Carrara marble, though the smallest freshman in the world who had risked his foolish neck to decorate their togaed chests with the numerals 1900 testified unofficially that they were nothing but cast iron enameled white and treated with a coat of waterproof varnish. As you counted them, left to right, they were intended likenesses of Phidias, Æschylus, Demosthenes and Homer. The cigarette-whiffing multitude who passed below, daily flowing toward History 5-B, learned long since to address them rather familiarly as Hideous, Erysipelas, Gazabo and Jeff. The average boy is a realist; but Chester A. Framm, during his three and a fraction years of college life, had been too self-supporting and self-sufficient to catch the spirit of the crowd. He and his mother had come all the way from Napa County to this second-rate but thriving institution. Being a few years older than the average student had helped him to finance his mother from a washerwoman into a laundry. Life had been real, earnest and unsocial with him, as it is apt to be with the young man who gains his college degree by the sweat of his brow.

Chester was rubbing that brow with a damp towel as, on the eve of great possibilities, he came out of the washroom and confronted his mother in the neat sitting room, which despite its detachment from business always reeked of heated irons upon starchy muslin. He was a tall young man with rather a magnificent head; a size too magnificent, perhaps, for his destiny. Some remote Scandinavian ancestor who had given him his name had substituted a sense of sublimity for a sense of humor—or possibly this is unfair.

"Ches," said the square, red-elbowed woman, who sat near the oilclothed table and raised her steel-framed spectacles, "are you going to be the principal speaker in this deebate at Adelphi Hall?"

"No, ma," he confessed, blushing a northern blush. "I was only admitted to the debating society last week. Carlotta says that I ought to begin in a small way."

"Oh;" Mrs. Framm was plainly disap-

pointed. Then her rock-bound old face wrinkled to a grim smile as she soliloquized: "So you're calling her Carlotta now!"

"There's no crime in that," he grunted, well aware that the blush was encroaching upon his shoulder blades. "I've known her over a month."

"So you have, dear." Her large face softened to a look of maternal pride. "Ches, it's high time you was going with some girls nice girls, I mean. None o' them highty-tighty fly-away red Tam-o'-Shanters, smoking cigareets on the sly, what with paint and powder and loud behavior with men. But I believe in marrying young; your father and me was married when we was picking hops on a farm up in Napa. But you're educated, Ches. And Carlotta Beam, being a professor's daughter and serious—"

"I'm not married yet," declared her son as he fussed with the stringy black cravat, which when tied accentuated his parliamentary appearance.

"No, but you must look round. She's got ambitions, that Beam girl. And not only that; she's the sort that'll put ambition into any man."

"I don't know as I want to become a professor, exactly," he demurred.

"You don't need to, Ches. But I don't intend you shall go into the laundry business. And you shan't be one of them society sports, what with giggling yellow-haired chits and dancing all night——"

"Where's my coat?" interrupted her heart's treasure.

Mrs. Framm brought the greenish thing out of a closet. They called them Prince Alberts in those days, and this example had belonged to the late Mr. Framm. It hung loosely over Chester's rangy form, but combined with his halo of blond hair and his senatorial countenance the ensemble was imposing.

"Oh, Chester!" cried his mother, "if you could become a great orator I'd die happy. I would indeed. Are you going to take Miss Carlotta to the dee-bate?"

"Why—ah"—he had slipped on his shabby brown hat and stood wincing to be off—"I promised to escort her to the hall. She's the principal for the negative."

"What's it all about—this dee-bate?"

"Resolved: That Application is more useful than Genius."

"It is," decreed his Spartan mother. "And good night, dearie. And make a good speech. And just follow Miss Carlotta's advice in everything—she's the sort of girl that——"

She encircled his neck with the strong arms which for as long as he could remember had been bare up to the elbow.

After a dutiful kiss he was speeding into the dusk when she called after him: "Ches-ter!"

He came back into the light of the doorway and saw she was holding out to him two small objects—a brown book and a disk of tin.

"Here's your Platform Elegance," she told him. "You might need it to look something up in."

"Thank you, ma."

"And you'd better take this can of Ajax Hay Fever Balm. You know your hay fever—excuse me. I forgot you never liked to have it mentioned. But this time of year when everything's gone to seed and it's sort of dry and the greasewood begins blowing—I thought you looked sort o' red round the nostrils this morning."

"I won't need it, thank you."

And Chester A. Framm stalked away toward higher things. A great orange-colored moon was rising in the east, gilding the dry tattered stalks of eucalyptus trees along the walk toward Faculty Row; occasionally the conical nuts would fall among dry leaves, giving forth the crackle of fairy artillery. In the moony distance Chester could see the white façade of the museum and its four top-heavy brethren guarding the roof. Fame, immortality, disdain of compromise! Why had Charlotta Beam sought him out from the mass and chosen him for the high peaks of destiny?

Chester A. Framm had just turned twentyfive. He was now early in his senior year at Dyak, and though the college could not rank with Leland Stanford or the University of California, three years of constant application to his major subject, economics, had convinced him that he had sufficient ability to lead a class of several hundred in a race for honors.

Always shy of young women he had carefully avoided the more or less alluring glances of the coeducational half, clustered in lecture halls or round the Ouad.

His mother had been ambitious for him in a general way; but her dreams had never gone beyond the state which she called educated. Chester had started college life late; yet his aspirations had been as fluid and nebulous as any cherished by the lightest-minded Gamma Gamma on the campus—until crystallization had come through contact with Carlotta Beam.

Professor Cyrus Beam, who conducted the English Department, had asked him with the rest of the senior class to a reception on Faculty Row. That was early in the semester. On that occasion Chester had been all feet and hands, treading on toes, knocking over bric-abrac in the crush of distinguished educators at the Beam cottage. Mrs. Beam—popularly known as Hissing Hattie—had shaken hands clammily and all but scared him to death. He had been wondering, as bashful men do, if he could escape without attracting too much attention, when Carlotta herself, a vision in flowing white, had come swimming toward him out of the intellectual mob.

It had been tremendously confusing, uplifting, inspiring. Carlotta, who was stately and rather tall, had fixed him with a tragic look of interest on her serious face; she was handsome in a Slavic way, though somewhat inclined to sallowness. Chester's first thought had been that here was an anchor to which he could tie

his seasick craft; every piece of furniture in the room contained a plaster cast and he had already knocked down two. Carlotta had seemed as anxious to learn about him as though he had been some vaulting celebrity already arrived.

"Why don't you try for the William H. Barbour prize?" she asked him over her lemonade later in the evening of entrancement.

Chester had stuttered something to the effect that he had never made a speech in his life, that he didn't even belong to the debating society.

"Not belong to the debating society!" The fair Carlotta showed just a trace of resemblance to Hissing Hattie in that shocked exclamation. "You must join to-morrow. I owe more to the debating society than to any other one thing."

Then he had remembered that Carlotta's oration had won the prize the year before. Did she think he had even a slight chance? Carlotta was sure of it. Chester had been faint with emotion as he poured forth confessions such as he had never made to any man or woman; zons of space, chasms of ambitious

distance he had leaped in that first revealing conversation.

Walking along to-night in California's winter moonlight, the Mighty Four looming closer in the distance, Chester thrilled again to think of that high purpose to which she had roused him.

"America needs orators," she had said, regarding him with the look of a muse about to burst into a tragic song. "Our statesmen today are little business men quarreling over petty figures. Where are our Websters and Clays and Patrick Henrys?"

Where, oh, where?

"Do you think you could make an orator out of me?"

He should have been stricken dead for the impiety, but she had rewarded him with a smile.

"With guidance you could accomplish anything. But you must take a vow never to lower your standards, never to make any cheap concessions to life."

He had vowed it thrice before the close of the evening; and ere he had hunted up the hat which was to cover his whirling intellect she had promised to tutor him in forensics, to teach him the rudiments of the Demosthenean art. And as they shook hands in that exalted first good-by she had presented him with the textbook which was to be his testament.

Its title in full was Platform Elegance: or First Steps in Forensics. It was written about 1873 by a genius of Dyak University who had spent his life classifying all the human emotions and framing them in a series of compli-The emotions, it seems, were cated charts. seven, but each of the seven had from nine to ninety subemotions. There was a right-hand and left-hand gesture for each emotion, with a set of attitudes and grimaces attached thereto. For instance, if one wished to express hatred one clenched the right fist-Gesture Twelve—and while lifting the elbow to an angle of forty-five degrees, advanced the right foot, slightly bending the knee, at the same time retarding the left shoulder and tightening the facial muscles to the diabolical expression illustrated in Cut Forty-six. Platform Elegance was enriched by numerous steel engravings showing the model orator—a young man with side whiskers, abundant hair, and a face quite pallid with all the emotions and subemotions mentioned in the charts.

He had gone to Carlotta almost daily during this enchanted month; they had sat together in her father's smugly classic library, where under an enlarged photograph of the ruined Parthenon she had gracefully demonstrated her art—the all but forgotten art of public speaking. He learned to handle his "a's" broadly, not to speak them out as uncultured persons do; he learned that "duty" should be pronounced "dyeuty"; but principally he learned that the very breath of greatness came, well-poised, from those finely turned lips. She sometimes looked at him in such a way—it was as though a marble goddess had leaned from her pedestal and whispered: "Mortal, thou shalt be mine!"

"Wednesday night you must be at the debating society," she had commanded a few sessions ago. He had been saying good afternoon in the little hallway and there had been something lingeringly significant about it. Chester knew next to nothing about these girl things. Sometimes she made him quite nervous. "I am to lead in the negative. After the regular debate there will be fifteen minutes of informal discussion for beginners."

"I—I've got to have something to talk about, haven't I?" he had asked falteringly.

"Not necessarily. It's the drill you need—thinking on your feet."

"Of course."

"Surely it will not be hard for you to formulate deductions from the ideas you will hear."

"Surely it will not," had parroted the candidate for rostrum honors.

His thumb had brushed her fingers as she was reaching out for the doorknob.

"Could I have the honor of escorting you there to the—oh, you know—Adelphi Hall on Wednesday?"

"I should be delighted, I am sure."

And here it was, Wednesday.

His moonlit walk toward Faculty Row had now taken him as far as the broad concrete walk facing the sawed-off Doric beauties of the museum. Above him the four tall statues loomed in the elf light. Chester A. Framm paused and permitted his fame-aspiring eyes to linger upon the bearded, metallic, thin-robed gentleman whom history called Demosthenes and whom the student body miscalled Gazabo. Demosthenes! How the white hero shimmered under the glimpses of the moon, fingering a sculptured scroll—doubtless the notes from which he spoke—the while his long, spare

forearm forever extended itself into an imitation of Gesture Eighteen, Platform Elegance. "Immortality!"

Chester A. Framm said this aloud, and blushed at the sound of his own voice. Little clouds were flying across the moon; flying souls, they seemed, hymning together the greatness of the spirit. Starkly stood Demosthenes upon his dizzy roof edge, poised as though just about to make a few choice remarks in behalf of the people of Megalopolis; which would have benefited little an undergraduate who had barely struggled through that paragraph in Xenophon which confesses that of Darius and Parysatis gignontai paides duo.

"Speak!" whispered Chester A. Framm.

But the father of all spellbinders responded not to the invitation. The divine lips were stony, the divine throat was never cleared. Possibly the lofty Demosthenes was waiting to be introduced by Homer, who stood at his right in an attitude which was distinctly presidential. Still the immortals held their peace.

Under the electric lamp which spot-lighted the walk leading from Syle's Dormitory for Ladies a distinctly feminine giggle insulted the rich silence. Three figures sauntered into the radiance. Two of them were swaggeringly male, but the center one, which was slight, short and female, was topped by a red tam-o'-shanter from under which many light sounds like thrush notes and parrot calls rippled, squawked, annoyed.

"Regular candy pig!" she trilled; and her hand was seen to snatch, catlike, at a confectionery box which her right-side escort held. "Old sugar gobbler!"

"Haw, Floss!" bawled a large booby, whom Chester, disgustedly huddled among the foliage, recognized as an athlete of no account. "Wait till I send you a real box from San Francisco."

"It would nev-er, nev-er be the same," she was drawling in her baby voice.

Birdlike she perked her small head from side to side, and under the artificial light her eyes sparkled like mischievous jewels.

"Nev-er, nev-er the same. Would it, Spig?" He whom she addressed as Spig proved to be one Ramon de Silva, a Californian of Spanish ancestry, who idled and frivoled with the Gamma Gammas and sometimes wrote athletic notes for the papers. Undergraduate usage

had tagged him The Spiggoty. The Spiggoty seemed far less cheerful than the candy pig, for as the group swung closer to Chester's leafy ambush the Spaniard's somber eyes with the lampblack fringes and single line of hairy brow revealed themselves as melancholy in the extreme.

"Would it ev-er be the same?" she persisted, turning her red tam toward The Spiggoty's total eclipse.

"Candy's never quite the same after you've eaten it."

"I believe he's mad at me," chirped she whom they called Floss.

By now the three were passing so close that Chester was obliged to step into the damp weeds to permit their transit. He could not disregard the pompon on her red Tam-o'-Shanter, that trifle being level with his nose.

"Oh!" Red Tam-o'-Shanter had caught a glimpse of his pallid face among the leaves. "Did you see what I saw? Somebody's looking at the Iron Men. I hope he doesn't steal anything. If he should walk away with poor old Gazabo——"

The rest was drowned in booby roars of admiration. Chester's last impression was of

cking French heels that seemed to dance as ey went. She was a dancing creature, this erloper.

"Rats!" growled fame's acolyte, and took a und-about lane toward Faculty Row. ChesA. Framm, dreaming of the gods, had umbled into a comedy of insect lift.

It was seven-thirty when he reached the ak gentility of Faculty Row and called for iss Carlotta Beam. He was a little early, it rned out, and Professor Beam as he came out the dining room was chewing. For the st time it was manifest that the faculty, like ortals, eat food. The professor offered a remonious hand and with the assurance that rlotta would presently appear returned to cabbage. Dishes clattered behind drawn ors. Fervently Chester hoped that they in't compel a wonderful girl like Carlotta to ish dishes.

True to her father's promise, Carlotta did esently appear. She must have scurried upirs by a rear way, for she entered majesally from the front stairway. She seemed rifyingly formal and was wearing a fur-coled cloak which Chester was sure he had seen Mrs. Beam.

Half the way over to Adelphi Hall Chester's attention was centered on his right elbow, which he had crooked like the handle of a jug in the event that Miss Beam might see fit to take his arm. It was the demand of etiquette, he knew, that a lady and gentleman should walk forth so linked. But Miss Beam remained obtuse. She chattered harmoniously on the topics of the day; Chester had no ears for the music. His arm was becoming numb from the wrist to the shoulder blade. At last he became aware that she had paused in her monologue and was asking him a question.

"What was that?" he inquired, straightening out his elbow and experiencing immediate relief.

"Are your familiar with Robert's Rules of Order?"

"Why, no. I didn't get that far in the book."

"It's not in the book," she informed him more coolly than he liked.

He found his mind straying—seeing red with a pompon on top, and annoying, yellowish eyes dancing below. He wondered if it had gone out of style for girls to take people's arms.

"This is my first try," he grunted. "Maybe I'd just better sit and watch."

"By no means!" There was no appeal against that decision. "You've begun none too early. I merely wished to warn you of one of the rules. When the informal discussion begins several people will probably rise and ask for the floor. You must wait till you are recognized."

"I know that," said Chester rather shortly. "That's the way they do at the class meetings."

"Splendid!" chimed the superlative Carlotta; which so cheered his heart that he ceased caring whether she had taken his arm or not.

A number of students were crowding in when they entered the hall, and Chester's first vision in that temple of thundering eloquence was of a life-size oil painting which hung over the rostrum. It was a portrait of William H. Barbour, eminent jurist, once a presidential candidate, and known in Dyak as donor of the Barbour Oratorial Medal. The aspirant's heart sank another notch when he saw that the audience was about equally divided between the serious thinkers and the lighter set of the college. Which of the two he had more to fear

he knew not at that moment. Later he found out.

"Sit here," whispered his spiritual guide, pointing to a vacant chair halfway down the aisle. He sank weakly into the place she had chosen for him and saw her settle herself among the speakers of the evening in the row nearest the platform. The chairman was a lean, tall Scot whose clan name, McNabb, had been shortened by the lighter set to the convenient monosyllable Gabb. Freshmen were shoving into the back seats. The lofty Gabb strode to his place on the platform and rapped resoundingly. The air was vibrant with doom.

"The meeting will please come to order!"

Was it a coincidence? At the instant the gavel dropped and the words were spoken Red Tam-o'-Shanter came dancing in under an increased convoy of adorers. Apparently she was playing fraternity against fraternity, for she had added Kappa Kappas to Gamma Gammas, and in the rear straggled The Spiggoty, jealously glowering.

"Oh, I didn't think we'd be so conspicuous," she giggled over the hush.

There were eight vacant seats right in front of the place where Miss Beam had set her Chester. Red Tam-o'-Shanter snuggled in between two gigantic Gammas, while Ramon de Silva, who was not athletic, occupied an end chair and turned pale with disappointed ambition.

It was not until the exercises began that Red Tam changed from a mild annoyance to an active nuisance. All was dignity with the exception of this Floss thing. On a front row, one finger supporting her expansive brow, Miss Beam sat in concentrated reflection; Gabb the chairman rose, and though he had an accordion-plaited face which he alternately bunched together and pulled out as he spoke of the treasurer's report no normal Adelphian would have considered this fair fruit for satire.

But he had no sooner opened his collapsible countenance than a smothered giggle from the row just ahead deflected Chester's attention. It seemed that Red Tam was giving one of her apparently inimitable imitations. The subject of her sketch was quite apparently Mr. McNabb. She did it with her hands. She pretended to be playing an accordion accompaniment to the speaker's words. Every time the face of Gabb closed up she would bring her hands together; when it lengthened out she

would pull them rapturously apart, her little fingers going busily over imaginary keys. The two big Gammas were rocking with joy. The dark-browed Gamma, out in the cold, permit ted himself a nervous smile.

"Cheese it, Floss!" gleefully warned he right-hand lummox. "We'll all be chucked."

"I don't care, do you?" responded the mu sician. "Wait till Hazzie reads the minutes of the meeting——"

"Dod gast it!" muttered Chester. "If she does that when I'm speaking—"

But the behavior of this Floss during the treasurer's report was of such a nature as to warrant a rebuke. Chester fidgeted as long a he could, then he leaned toward the scarle headdress. He was tall enough to look over her shoulder, and while he was hestitating for words he spied that which turned his annov ance to a sort of panic fear. She was wearing flowers—an exaggerated bunch of marguer ites. Chester's hands grew cold as along the base of his nose there passed a tickling itching Marguerites! The very thought of thrill. those flowers, which had always spelled hay fever for him, sickened his soul, brought swif tears of influenza to his eyes. His mother had been right. That box of Ajax Hay Fever

He huddled himself back, as far as possible away from the menace. Desperately his eyes sought the rows of chairs. Not an empty seat in the hall. The place was packed to the doors. The agony of self-control kept his mind off the rostrum; but he was quite unable to restrain an occasional glance in the direction of that being whom he so passionately longed to kill. Strands of honey-colored hair showed under the red tam; her complexion was high and clear, like that of a child who has been playing in the wind; once she turned her impudent glances far enough for him to see her eyes. which were bright gray with little golden flecks across the irises. How pretty she was: and how unspeakable!

At some indefinite point of time he heard applause and was aware that the cocksure affirmative had got down to give the negative a chance. Chairman McNabb unfolded himself to announce that Miss Carlotta Beam would next be heard from. Chester's sympathetic heart stood still. Carlotta laid aside her cloak and undulated to the rostrum—saffron clad, serene, indifferent of fate. She brought her

right hand, half closed, to her breast in a gesture she had learned at a Delsarte school two seasons before. The room lay in a hush.

Red Tam was heard distinctly to clear her throat. Chester held his gaze toward the platform, but something told him that Flossie had struck that very pose, and that Gamma and Kappa were equally enthralled.

Words of wisdom flowed from a deep well-pitched voice where every "a" stood out broad and splendid, every paragraph enjoyed the advantage of a full stop. As winner of the William H. Barbour prize of last year Miss Beam held an advantage over lesser orators and showed it. She began with a simile of Pegasus and worked easily into the legend of Abraham Lincoln and the pine-knot fire. Chester's thoughts flew rapidly to the subject of himself.

"And before I close, Mister Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, permit me to repeat that application is but the work of man while genius is given to us by the grace of God. Application is merely the wick by which the light is thrown, genius is the oil which——"

The chairman's gavel came down. It was evident that she had overtalked her time. Ches-

ter thought he heard a voice say "Coal oil." Was it that awful Red Tam-o'-Shanter? It didn't so much matter then, because an idea had leaped full grown from his skull; one of those dangerous things by which reputations are made or shattered at a stroke. Little he cared then for the rest of the debate; Chester sat rapt in contemplation—possibly he would not be able to get out the whole idea within the three minutes allotted to such as him according to the rules.

The seconds finished and the principals leaped to the rebuttal. Even the precious words of Miss Carlotta Beam were wasted on her admirer, who crouched as though for a spring.

He had quite forgotten the Red Tam and her talent for discord.

Carlotta sat down at last. Then there fell an awful hush during which several officious ladies and gentlemen rose and filed into an antercom.

The collapsible Gabb unfolded his face to announce: "While the judges are retiring to formulate their decision the rules permit of an informal discussion from the floor. Each speaker is limited to three minutes. If

there are any members who wish to speak——"
"Mister Chairman!"

Several new members had come to standing postures in various parts of the room, but Chester A. Framm seemed to have leaped halfway to the chandeliers in the wildness of his attack. Other voices were clamoring, but the distracted bellow of the inspirational laundryman drowned out all competitors.

"Mr. Framm has the floor," decreed the inexorable Gabb.

Competition thus swept aside Chester found himself standing alone in the isolation of greatness. He had already decided to employ Gesture Twelve, expressive of hatred, but in that flash of intelligence the devil in a tomatocolored cap caused him to look down on the little tormentor of the seat in front. The look of exaggerated interest she was turning up to him merely added to his confusion.

He must have stood there an unnecessarily long time, for he heard Gabb's generous offer repeated through the room: "You have the floor, Mr. Framm."

The aspirant still stood, mentally thumbing the pages of Platform Elegance. Should he employ the gesture described in Cut Eighteen as Remorse or Pity? In a sort of panic he brought his hands to the proper position, but in the urgency of the moment clenched his fist quaveringly in an imitation of Cut Forty-six, descriptive of hatred. His arm came up to a stiff right angle; an unhappy impulse caused him to glance again at the girl in front. She, too, had brought her arm up to a stiff right angle.

Chester A. Framm saw red, but maddened by the thought that something must be said and that immediately, he opened the floodgates and roared: "Ladies and gentlemen, enthusiasm are not——"

He paused, cold with the fear that his audience was not with him.

"If it aren't, what are it?" came a still small voice right under his ear.

"Enthusiasm," he resumed in a desperate bellow, "is not the normal state of man."

With that he resumed his chair—or would have resumed it had not the chair turned traitor and slid out from under him, permitting Chester to take his seat heartily on the floor. Adelphi howled. Above the storm the gavel sounded like the blows of a hammer on a coffin lid. Blinded with his shame the boy orator

got up and got out; but not too soon to hear Red Tam's appreciative comment:

"Isn't he fun-ny? Went off like a regular old alarm clock. I wonder who ever told him he could make a speech?"

Once in the open air Chester hugged a Doric column until the meeting broke up, and he could at last pick out Miss Beam chatting easily in a setting of serious-minded students.

"What happened to you?" was her very natural question as soon as he got her disentangled. The fact that she took his arm added a little warmth.

"I got started all right," he lamely apologized to his instructress. "And then that Floss girl—"

"She's been a disturbing influence ever since she came to college!" Carlotta informed him with nearer a show of temper than he had ever before seen in her. "Girls like Florabel Brannon take all the dignity out of coeducation. Last Wednesday in English 2-B she told father that she thought the Decameron was Scott's best novel. She insisted that it must be by Scott because Decameron was such a Scottish word. Fancy!

"Please overlook her. She won't be here

long. And don't let yourself be discouraged. Demosthenes, you know, started with a pebble under his tongue."

"A pebble!" he groaned. "I swallowed a sand wagon!"

But he was ever so grateful to her just the same.

"You have something over two months to prepare for the Barbour medal contest," she said before bidding him good night by her little jig-sawed door.

"You don't mean to say I've got any chance——"

The thought stunned him.

"Why, surely! I fully intend that you shall enter for the contest and win it."

"By ginger, you have got faith!"

"Yes—a great deal—in you," her rich contralto rolled out as she gave him her hand.

And this was the first time that it ever dawned upon Chester A. Framm that women are peculiar.

He repeated the reflection, however, as soon as he got back to the flat over the Bon Ton Laundry and found his mother, clad in her best widow's frock, waiting for him under the lamp.

"Where in the world have you been?" he

asked, for never before in his college days had he seen her in formal costume.

"To the Adelphi meetin'," she told him. "I stood up for hours a-waiting for you to begin. I just told you to take that box of Ajax Salve."

Chester groaned and went to bed. Neither Ajax nor Helen could salve his wound.

But he was no sooner between the sheets than she came to him, intent upon the maternal process known as tucking in. It always made Chester feel like a freshman.

"That Carlotta Beam is a smart girl," she insisted. "Sort of wonderful and full of brains. I bet she'll make a President of the United States out of the man she marries."

"I shouldn't wonder," agreed Chester, his thoughts already wandering toward possibilities.

"Not one of them cigareet-smoking chits with circus clothes. No, sir-ree!"

"She's different," said Chester, hoping his mother would leave him alone and permit him to follow the glowing progress of his dreams.

"I wonder if she ain't just a mite older than you?" The son made no response; therefore the mother went out and closed the door softly after her.

CHAPTER II

AN ANNOYANCE

How Carlotta Beam did have faith in Chester A. Framm and did coach and groom him to the point of perfection whereby he was able to outface fate and win an oratorical medal—one of those solid-gold trophies as big as a dinner plate and engraved with laurel wreaths in high relief—constitutes nothing more than a climacteric point in a college career. And since college days bear but a faint resemblance to real life the oratorical medal is entitled to merely a semicolon's worth in the history of Chester A. Framm.

Something like two weeks after the Adelphi fiasco he came again into actual contact with that pestiferous Red Tam-o'-Shanter. It was a sloppy day, and Chester, coming round a corner of the old Chemistry Lab, was attempting to manage a cotton umbrella and a notebook with the same hand. With every struggle to open the umbrella he lost a little influ-

ence over the notebook, which had a slippery cover and a passion for getting itself lost. At last he succeeded in spreading the canopy over his head, but upon the instant the sly little book popped out from his elbow and landed plump in a coffee-colored pool beside the path.

"You've lost your notes, Mr. Cicero," came a naïve treble out of the bole of an ancient live oak by the corner.

He tilted his umbrella and got the drip down his collar as he leaped to one side and beheld the wet little dryad of the oak. Red Tam, after the manner of chameleons, had turned to green; or, to be more explicit, Miss Brannon was wearing a greenish waterproof creation with just one rubbery yellowish flower above the brim.

"Thank you," said he haughtily, groping with his hat as he leaned down to salvage the wreck.

But as he was shaking out its dripping covers, what should this Flossie do but come over and take it away from him.

"If you turn it that way," she said, "the mud gets inside. And then who can tell what great big thoughts will be all gummed together!"

As she was only a girl, and a small one at

that, Chester could neither hit her nor swear aloud. So he stood in the wet and watched her deft little fingers as she tore a shred of paper from a damp candy box and set about drying the notebook. It was one of those irritating situations in which an enemy offers a spoonful of good to indemnify a continent of evil.

"There," she smiled—oh, so adorably!—as she gave it back to him. "And now you aren't going to offer me half of your umbrella or anything as far as Miss Thompkins'?"

"Ah. May I have the pleasure?" he asked, stiffly changing the umbrella to a sheltering position.

"If you call it a pleasure," she said; and got very close to him under the cotton eaves before informing him: "Umbrellas are a joke—unless you're in love."

"Oh."

He looked shyly down at that mobile, flashing little face and wondered what she was driving at. Was she hinting that he turn the umbrella over to her?

"Of course you've never been in love." Something about her inspired him to this impertinence.

"Me?" She gave one of those awful little

trills. "About a hundred and twenty times, I guess."

He strode grimly along, carefully manipulating the umbrella so as to keep her dry.

"I bet you're a noble character," said she after a while.

"Why?"

"You're letting the cutest waterfall run onto your hat—all on account of poor little me."

He adjusted the handle in such a way that poor little she should get her share of rain after that.

"You're not really truly awfully mad at me, are you?" she chirped as soon as they had got halfway down the path. He felt uncomfortably like The Spiggoty, whom he had overheard fuming at the same question.

"Why should I be?" he asked, looking down from his exalted plane.

Her eyes, he found, were neither gray nor yellow. Gold dust had been spilled into liquid crystal. Her nose was slightly snubbed. She had prankish eyebrows, tweaking up at the corners.

"'Course you shouldn't," she was quick to respond. "I always go to the debating society because it's more fun than amateur night. And say—you were wonderful! Your arm went up like a traveling crane, and then the steam drill started in. Oh, you Cicero!"

"If I afforded you amusement I feel myself fully repaid," he assured her.

"I knew you would!" she chimed. "It's just what I've been thinking about you."

"About me?"

"Oh, yes! I think about ev-erybody." She gave him a stare which at that moment was as blank and as innocent as a baby's.

"What have you been thinking about me?" A little shutter in his heart had come loose and was flapping.

"I think you're a great big noble grand man," she eulogized. "You wouldn't mind anything I could do any more than a splendid iron statue would get mad at the katydids skipping round it having a good time."

"Are you laughing at me?"

"Cross my heart."

No crease of mirth was apparent upon those wonderful cheeks, sweeter by far than Hybla's honeyed roses. This seemed a fair moment in which to say his say with her.

"There are things in life," he began, "much more important than having a good time."

"Oh, is there?" she asked, her eyes widening to a look of wonder.

"Yes, there is—are, I mean."

"You always get your 'is's' and your 'are's' twisted, don't you!" This time her giggle was unmistakable.

He shut up like a clam. Whereupon she snuggled very close against his wet sleeve.

"What's more important than having a good time?" she coaxed; and Chester was truly frightened by the heady sensation it gave him.

"Well," said he, "there's ambition."

"Oh, I forgot about Napoleon," was the way she took it. "What's your ambition, Mr. Cicero?"

Despite the implied insult he stuck to it.

"I'm going in for a public career."

"Sure. I know—one of those great big howling whooping orators like Horace Greeley——"

"Horace Greeley was a journalist," he corrected her.

"I always mix up my historical heroes," she told him with the little-girl humility of which she was capable. "I haven't got any mind. But I know what you mean. Oratory is wonderful. There was a gentleman lived next to



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or shine—he'd get full on Bourbon and n orating. My Cousin Nannie and I used erch out on the veranda roof listening to

He was splendid—especially when he got ane. It was per-fectly delicious until one t he thought he was Julius Cæsar, put on a tshirt and crawled out on the roof and be-— Hello. Why, here we are at Miss mpkins'."

are enough, they were. Chester found self at the gate, actually shaking hands with and lingering as he shook. He wondered t Carlotta would say, if anything.

You're in the laundry business, aren't "inquired the remarkable being, bringing thought out of the nowhere. Chester's grew hot with a sudden flush.

les. That is, temporarily——"

Jntil you can move into the Hall of Fame. n't see any reason why you should be med of it."

Who's ashamed of it?" he asked with ineledirectness.

should think the laundry business would reat. The Chinese think of all the fine gs first. If I had a business like that I'd work it up into the wholesale and be the biggest laundryman in the world, bar none. Say, can you blow water through your teeth onto the shirts the way the Chinamen do?" Getting no encouraging response she went right on: "I'd rather be a crackajack laundryman than Shakespere or any other of those tin statues on top of the museum."

"Shakespere isn't on top of the museum," he corrected her again.

"He ought to be," said she; and by the way she said it it was easy to infer that she regarded the museum as a storehouse for discarded reputations.

"I'm pleased to meet you," he fumbled.

"I bet I know exactly what's the matter with you," she insisted, holding on to his hand.

"Matter with me?"

"Yeah. You never have any fun after dark."

"Don't I?" He had never thought of that.

"This college is a morgue. I've flunked in four subjects this week and if I stick another month it's because God loves the Irish. If I go home now Aunt Het'll tie a flatiron to my leg and drop me in the bay. She wants to make a school-teacher out of me. Can you beat it?"

"I can't," he heartily agreed.

"I tell you what let's do—why don't you come round to-night and pretend you're helping me with my psychology?"

"To-night?" The prospect was wild.

"Sure! Just stick round until Miss Thompkins turns the hose on you."

"I shall be pleased."

He got away under his soggy umbrella. Behind the bleachers he paused and considered his case. He had promised Carlotta to come round at eight with the first draft of his oration, the subject of which was to be William of Orange.

CHAPTER III

"WHO EVER TOLD YOU YOU COULD MAKE A SPEECH?"

IT was on the evening of the twenty-seventh of January that Chester A. Framm with the aid of Ajax Balm got his semicolon's worth of glory in the shape of the William H. Barbour medal, which when it was pinned on by a loquacious dean looked bigger than a barrel head and felt twice as heavy. For a full half hour he had thundered on episodes mostly cribbed from Motley's Dutch Republic, for a full half hour he had painted the Duke of Alva as black as he undoubtedly was and the Prince of Orange as white as he probably wasn't. Carlotta Beam had sat in the front row in order to give him courage. Chester, from hypothesis to conclusion, had kept his eyes on a pink spot in the balcony which, so he imagined it, represented Flossie Brannon in an evening gown.

The dean predicted very fine things for

Chester's future as he fastened the elaborately engraved decoration upon Chester's swelling breast.

The rostrum smelled of cut flowers, escaping gas and sachet powder. The evening was pitched in the highest key of glory, but like all earthly glory it stunned rather than exalted.

After the exercises the faculty gave a reception—think of it!—to Chester A. Framm. It was held in the college library. Who's Who in Dyak assembled to shake him by the hand, and Chester, who should have been a proud and happy man, experienced the first pain of a breaking heart.

They were standing right under the bust of Robert Burns, fitting witness to such a plight, and the young orator was trying to look interested while his triumphant mother held his hand, bidding him listen to Surrogate Judge Foster and the Reverend Mr. Smiley quarreling over whether the boy should go in for the law or the ministry. Carlotta, impressive in her white muslin, held aloof among the young instructors, and Chester would have thanked her then and there for what she had done for him had not Mrs. Beam come hissing up to gloat like a cultured vampire. Her changed

attitude toward Mrs. Framm already indicated that the match was as good as made.

In all the tumult and the shouting Chester's mind was not on his success. His eyes wandered round the room seeking that which was not worth worrying over. He got a glimpse from Carlotta which plainly said "Come hither," but he remained disconsolately between Mrs. Beam and Mrs. Framm, to be embarrassed by the latter's clattering on:

"As I was saying to Ike Whittell: "They're as cozy as two peas in a pod, them two. It takes a girl like Carlotta to bring out Chester's fine points,' says I; and Ike says—"

Everybody in Dyak came to shake hands with Chester. Everybody, did I say? Chester's attention continued to wander. Could it be possible that after the froth of gossip she had whipped up round the university, after the tantalizing dance she had led poor Framm, after the pangs of jealousy she had created in the Beam household—Flossie Brannon was too indifferent to his well-being to show up?

He caught the flash of her pink gown at last as she came in at the far end of the room, closely followed by The Spiggoty, who wore a dinner jacket, as became a worldly Gamma.

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She never looked toward the hero of the evening; Ramon de Silva seemed all in all to her at that moment. As though sharing the sweetest secret in the world the two sauntered through and disappeared into the auditorium beyond. A moment later the notes of a piano throbbing ragtime violated the dignity of Chester's reception.

"Mercy!" hissed Mrs. Beam. "It's quite against the rules."

"It's that yellow-haired hussy again," intimated Mrs. Framm.

"I'll see that it's stopped."

Chester volunteered this noble service and strode away toward the shocking noise. He had frequented Miss Thompkins' sufficiently of late and attempted to outsit de Silva often enough to know The Spiggoty's skillful touch at the keyboard. From the great square piano behind the palms his notes were capering merrily, and through the exotic foliage Chester could see scraps of pink chiffon performing evolutions quite at variance with the rules. Once behind the sheltering palms the self-appointed censor saw what he saw: Flossie was executing the cakewalk, then in vogue.

"Listen at him, Cicero!" she crowed. "Spig's new piece—The Potato Bugs' Parade."

"It's against the rules," said Chester severely.

"Who cares for the rules? I'm fired anyhow," quoth she caressingly. "Let 'er go, Spig!"

"Look here, Framm, on whose authority are you giving orders here?" growled the Spaniard, staying his harmonic fingers and wheeling on the piano stool.

"On the authority of the college," replied the boy orator.

The Spiggoty had come to his feet and his beetling brow was drawn down almost to the base of his nose. He was consideraly smaller than Chester. This, possibly, had saved him on several occasions.

"I see." The Spiggoty's teeth were large and he showed them to advantage. "You're the dean, I suppose; and the Committee on Student Affairs and—"

Flossie spluttered her wild delight, for trouble was her natural element.

"Spiggy-Wiggy's got another brain storm!" she giggled, dancing in between the dangerous

pair. "Gosh, Spig, if you only knew how funny you look——"

"I should like to know by whose authority—" he was taking up the refrain when she cut in: "I'll tell you, Spig! Why don't you go and look it up?"

"What-look up what?"

"The authority. Possibly the dean would know; or the registrar."

"I see."

"Now run along, Spig. That's a dear kitten."

And the miracle of it was that Spig did run along, spitting like an angry leopard, yet undoubtedly obeying. She was a hypnotist, nothing less. Chester would have laughed, but the occasion for him held no humor.

"Don't ask me to have another glass of lemonade," she went right on, as soon as they were alone. "It hasn't even got lemons in it. Gee! Isn't it lucky you don't dance! Because it's awful to know how and not be allowed. It's just the way drunkards must feel when they're locked up with saloons all round them. There's one next to my aunt's house in San Francisco—a drunkard, I mean."

"Yes, he thought he was Julius Cæsar and crawled out on the roof."

"So he did. I always repeat my stories."

So she rattled along, obviously temporizing. She had a way of snuggling, and to-night she was practicing her art on Chester as the two leaned against a window sill. His heart stood still, waiting for something it was breaking to hear. Not a word. He might have been a casual guest instead of the orator of the evening for all the importance she gave to his so recent triumph or to the large gold plaque conspicuously pinned to the front of his frock coat.

"What's this about your being fired?" he asked after one of his looming pauses.

"Yeah," she agreed; "I flunked out two weeks ago."

"You didn't say anything about it—to me."

"Didn't I? I didn't think you'd be interested, maybe."

The yellowish gleam of her half-closed eyes got him—a fatal wound. It was then that he gave up; knew why he had treated Carlotta so shabbily to-night; realized that these unworthy weeks he hadn't been devoting his evenings to Miss Thompkins' boarding house merely for the intellectual upliftment of Miss

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Florabel Brannon. Intellectually she was irreclaimable. And yet——

"Then I suppose you're going home," he managed to say after clearing his throat.

"This morning Old Goggles"—by this she meant the registrar—"notified me. The darling was sore as a boil. I'm an outlaw. I don't know why he let me come to this party—unless he's afraid to leave me unwatched."

"When do you go?" repeated the unfortunate.

"On the eight-thirty-one to-morrow. And how I hate to get up!" She yawned in anticipation.

Not a word for him! Her eyes were roving toward the library door, through which, too apparently, she expected The Spiggoty to return, cooled and repentant.

Vanity strangling pride, he shuffled his pose and asked as carelessly as he knew how: "I don't suppose you heard the—er—speaking?"

"Didn't I, though! Wasn't it a scream?"

Of course. That was how she would take it.

"I wasn't aware---"

"That was what made it so funny," she giggled. "You weren't aware—not the least little bit. What was the name of the gentleman you stood up and shouted about?"

"William of Orange."

"What a peculiar name! Now if I was going to be a historical hero I wouldn't name myself after any kind of fruit. All during your sermon I was thinking how awful it would be to have people call you Henry of Lemons or Charlie the Apple Man. Now you're going to get mad again."

He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and took a shuffling step away. It was fortunate for Dyak and for him that she was going to-morrow morning.

"Chester!"

She called it after him in the sweetest little voice. It was the first time she had ever called him anything but Cicero. The perfumed anesthetic unsteadied him and when he turned toward her she was giving him the full benefit of her gaze; her lovely cheeks were bright as peonies.

"You're an absurd sort of kid," she took up her theme as soon as he had got back to the window sill. "With your hair trimmed and a snappy business suit on I think you'd really do." "Do for what?" he growled, trying to back away. But she was holding him fast by the broad lapels of his frock coat.

"Oh, just do. You're a regular handsome wretch, Chester A. Framm. But you do need trimming."

He stood there like a mass of putty between her soft white hands: a passionate mass of putty which longed to clasp her and make romantic avowals that would have been wasted on her frivolous ears. One of those mischievous hands had now strayed up to the William H. Barbour gold medal and had given it two swift downward jerks, after the manner of a conductor starting a street car.

"Jing-jing!" she chirped.

"Great Scott!" groaned Chester, covering the trophy from her further profanation.

"Oh see the pretty badge! The Grand High Mookum of the Refreshment Committee at the Sons and Daughters of Ararat Annual Barbecue. Poor old Cicero! Have you got to wear it round everywhere, even to bed?"

"Floss, you're—awful," he told her with less severity than he had intended.

"Did it take you all this time to find it out?

Well now, you'd better go back and join your tragedy queen."

This, then, was to be good-by. With all his suspected genius Chester had no avowal worthy of the occasion.

"I'm—I'm sorry you didn't like my speech," he blurted.

"Whew!" she whistled and burst into a peal of laughter. "Who in the world ever told you you could make a speech?"

"Good-by," said he shortly, holding out his hand.

"So long," responded Floss. "See you in heaven, maybe."

He now took his departure to avoid the approaching Spiggoty.

"Chester." Again that sweet small note rang after him. He came rapidly back.

"Won't you give me that badge just as—you know—one of those souvenir things?"

How wonderful is man! Without a word he loosened the golden pin from his coat and with trembling fingers fastened the William H. Barbour medal to the cluster of pink chiffon over the place where her heart should have been. There were some five or six fraternity pins already there.

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"Why can't I see you to the train in the morning?" he pleaded quite deliriously.

"Oh, that will be splen-did!" she cried. Spiggoty was now within hearing distance. "Of course there'll be quite a bus load, but do come!"

Next morning at a little before eight he picked up the bus just as it was rounding the museum toward Miss Thompkins' boarding house. The bus contained but one other passenger so far. It was The Spiggoty, and over his hateful knees he held a long box, obviously bearing flowers. They were as nothing to one another, though the drive was some minutes long and they were permitted to sit out in the cold while Flossie kissed Miss Thompkins, forgot her hand bag, went back for her umbrella, remembered she had packed it, and kissed Miss Thompkins again before she smilingly announced that she was ready.

On the way to the station Chester sat in uncomfortable expectancy that the Gammas and the Kappas might at any moment storm the wagon in competitive good-bys. But their ride was unmarred by any such incident. Apparently Floss had sifted the college down to the present pair. She took De Silva's flowers and

called him a sweetheart. They were barely in time for the train, and the picture of Miss Brannon being tossed aboard a moving coach, followed by hand bags and flower boxes, was not a romantic last glimpse. Just a flash of pinkish feather and eyes that were intoxicating like yellow wine. Her voice and her influence were submerged in distance.

Chester A. Framm and Ramon de Silva, equally young, equally disillusioned, stood a moment in all the pathos of their heroic attitudes. Chester had an impulse to speak to The Spiggoty and suggest that their bygones should be wiped out in what was too plainly a bygone. Instead the unmedaled orator turned toward the east gate of the campus.

Splashing through the seasonable mud he could descry a lone bicycle, female in sex, winding its way from Faculty Row to the Quad. Carlotta Beam, even though engaged in the undignified work of pedaling, still looked the goddess that she was. He wasn't sure that she hadn't witnessed that good-by. As a matter of fact he didn't care.

CHAPTER IV

TWO STRAWS AND A ZEPHYR

'APRIL sunshine was on the California valleys and Chester A. Framm was already struggling with his valedictorian address when the Floss Idea interfered to wreck his program, as it always did. Having wiped her off the slate he had found life's problem less difficult, if dreary at times. He had reserved Commencement Day as the occasion upon which he should ask Carlotta Beam to marry him. It was a logical step upward on the ladder of fame.

He had taken it for granted that she would accept him and he was justified in the belief. Possibly the certainty of it had delayed him so long.

On the very eve of the Floss Idea his divine instructress had taken him in hand gently, patiently, as was her wont.

"We mustn't rest on our laurels," she had told him over the scribbled notes for his new oration. "I want your commencement address to be the best work of your life thus far. No steps backward. The William H. Barbour medal"—she never asked him what had become of it; that was suspicious—"marked the first awakening. Your commencement address must be your challenge to life, your defiance to petty things, mean vanities and—disturbing influences."

Did she mean Floss? Surely this girl, already a woman in mind and ability, was of too noble a cast to harbor spite against a mere red tam-o'-shanter. Carlotta Beam was the finest woman he had ever met. He had never met many, that was true. But she had within her an ideal and a strength that seemed to warp other women to the realm of insects, where they belonged.

On the night before the Floss Idea he walked home under the springtime stars, picturing to himself numerous public occasions, affairs of nation-shaking importance—Chester A. Framm always the central figure in the group; his wife, always an invisible influence for good, somewhere in the background.

Next morning a boy on a bicycle brought a telegram over from the station. Fortunately for Chester his mother was at work in the back of the laundry, so he got the messenger paid off and the envelope open undetected.

"Meet me important lunch noon College Inn. FLoss."

And wasn't it ridiculous and unheard-of and just like Floss? Chester had never known of anything quite so absurd. He hadn't the remotest idea of meeting her "important lunch noon College Inn." That was settled. In the first place there was a history quiz at eleventhirty. In the second place he hadn't a red cent beyond a handful of laundry money which rightfully belonged to his mother. In the third place he hadn't any clothes beyond the dreadful sack suit he wore and his ceremonial cutaway; and the College Inn was a rather horsy place, specializing in red steaks and brown ale at San Francisco prices—a fashionable rendezvous for the gilded youth of Dyak who could afford fine food outside the college dry belt.

Of course he would do nothing of the kind. Strengthened by this resolve he stopped at Baum's Toggery Shop and bought himself a dollar necktie. He needed it undoubtedly, to wear to his history quiz. At eleven o'clock he strolled by the College Inn and paused before

its smart Tudor front to take a look at the place. It wasn't far out of his way to the classroom; just a mile or so. He put on something of the swagger he had noted among the lighter set and walked into the big dining room, which was done in frowning oak, with pewter mugs along the shelves, university shields painted on the frescoes, and in a far corner little stalls holding tables for two.

After all, thought Chester A. Framm, she had wired him, not The Spiggoty.

Then the awful thought got him by the throat: How did he know she hadn't wired The Spiggoty?

He got out before a waiter could head him off and strolled sheepishly round the town, rumpling in his pockets the few hard-earned bills wrested from the laundry business. His mother owed him that much, he felt; she was making money and he was doing a great deal for what he got. He looked at his dollar watch. It was lacking six minutes of twelve. He turned and almost ran toward the College Inn. A bus from the train was just stopping at the door when he swung into view. A girl in a green coat—it was the brightest coat he had ever seen—got out and caused the driver

to whoop with delight as she handed up her fare. Chester was still of a mind to run away, because he knew that Flossie had kept her appointment.

"Hello, old Goober!" was her first address to him as she took both his hot hands in her little gloves. "How's fame?"

"I—I don't know," he faltered, studying the face which seemed to trick him out of everything he revered in life. "I haven't been watching very closely."

"My word!" she exclaimd. "I thought that Hissing Hattie's angel daughter would have you in Congress by now."

She had tiptoed up the steps and was leading the way into the dining room. Once inside she made a bee line for one of the small stalls at the end of the room.

"Order me pounds and pounds of raw meat," she commanded as soon as they were seated; and when a chubby waiter had made his appearance, "Hello, Harry!"

"Good morning, Miss Brannon." He was smiles all over, as Flossie's environment was apt to be. "I thought you quit."

"I did. And Harry, bring in one of those deep-dish things full of grass and tomatoes—

and if you love me don't pour any of that linseed stuff over it."

"I won't, Miss Brannon," avowed the humblest of her adorers.

"And oo—have you got some of that sweetheart old dove of a clam chowder you used to have?"

"The very same; quite good, Miss Brannon."
"Forward march!" commanded the disturbing influence.

"I'm so hungry," she told Chester as soon as they were alone, "that I could eat sauer-kraut."

"So am I," he confessed. It was strange, but this was the first occasion for months when he had looked forward to his food.

"And you're going to ask, 'To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit to?' I know you are. Dear old Cicero—will you be just too dreadfully shocked for words if I tell you that I've missed you?"

"Not half so much as I've missed you," he heard his trancelike tones repeating.

"Not really!" And to his ineffable surprise her eyes grew bright with tears.

"Has anything happened, Flossie? Anything in the world that I can do for you?"

"Happened!" As suddenly she was laughing again. "Cicero, what couldn't happen to me?"

"You've stated the case," he agreed, and smiled one of his solemn smiles.

"Well, you see Aunt Het—she's awfully funny when she gets mad. She has false teeth and—Hello, here's the sweetheart old chowder!"

The connection between teeth and temper was left unexplained while Flossie Brannon went at her food with a vigor most unmaidenly.

"We're awfully early and jay," she volunteered after her plate had been half cleared. "But this is a business man's lunch. The train goes back at three-twelve."

"Goes back where?"

"To San Francisco, Mr. Geese."

"Oh."

She reverted to her chowder. Three early Kappas filed in, gave a dramatic start and settled down at a table in an opposite corner. Flossie Brannon never looked their way. Chester was ineffably grateful, partly because an interruption would have maddened him, partly because Kappas and Gammas with their worldly airs made him more awkward than Nature had intended him to be.

"So your Aunt Het," he prompted her as soon as steak impended.

"She always loses her false teeth when she gets mad. Think of anybody not being glad to see me! She stuck me in a dungeon dire and said that I was worse than my grandfather. Of course that's a slander. Then she trotted out Mr. Blink; he's just desperate to marry me and I had a lot of fun spoiling his life for a few weeks——"

"Who's this Mr. Blink?" he huskily inquired.

"That isn't the name on his office door. He's
worth three hundred and six squillion dollars
and he's so near blind that he couldn't see me
half the time when I was making faces at him.

half the time when I was making faces at him. Then it got so tragic and disgusting—the way I behaved and all—that Aunt Het delivered a manifesto."

Flossie paused and adored the steak.

"Are those silly little Kappas still gheeking at us?" she asked after her first bite. That also was like Floss.

"They're still there," he acknowledged nervously.

"Let 'em stay."

"So your Aunt Het delivered a manifesto."

"Mr. Blink and Aunt Het got together and announced our engagement."

"To Mr. Blink—publicly!" he gasped like a fish.

"No; just to me. That was yesterday. Poor old Aunt Het—she's suffered so after I got home. So last night she sat up till all hours telling me I was a drug on the market and that if I didn't marry Mr. Blink—and that right sudden—she'd tie a can to me and start me toward the Cliff House. So I went to my room and had a good cry—"

"Poor Flossie!" said the distracted Chester Framm, longing to pick her up and administer comfort in the very presence of the Kappas.

"Oh, I enjoyed it ever so much. And this morning, I just packed my bags and came to you."

It was all so fearfully simple—like an earthquake or a forest fire.

"Flossie, my dear," he asked her upon that wonder, "why in the world did you come to me?"

"Why!" She opened her wide eyes upon him. "You're in love with me, aren't you?"

It came quite naturally, as miracles are apt to come.

"I'd die for you," he whispered, and leaned over to look down into those wells of gold.

"Bully!" she cried. "Then it's all fixed!" "What's all fixed?"

He came swooning back to the great world.

"Why, I'm in love with you too," she informed him with her terrible directness, and passed him her hand in bold defiance of the Kappa stare.

"When—when did this happen?" He clutched her fingers incredulously.

"I got to thinking about you. I'm a terrible deep thinker when I get started. You're all over great big knobs of crudeness—but I don't know. Falling in love's like dropping into a canal—you can't tell just what drop drowned you, can you? You're an awful slob and you do need a haircut—and what couldn't I do with you in a new suit of clothes! These other little feathers"—a gesture indicated the Kappas and the Gammas and all the Greek alphabet— "they'll be either dead drunk or clerking in shoe stores in a few years. You've got—what-you-call-'em—poss-i-bil-i-ties. Gee, what a long word."

His heart stood still. Then she had, after all, appreciated his oratorical gifts.

"You mean my-"

"You've got a won-derful head for business. Just see the way you built up that laundry."

He would have dropped her hand had it not been so delicious.

"Floss, I haven't had a happy minute since you left. It seemed to take away all my——"

"That darned ambition! I know. Now listen to me, Cicero. Please propose, and do it now. You don't need to kiss me—yet."

"Will you marry me?"

"This afternoon, Goober."

"Goober?"

"That's what I'm going to call you when we're married."

"But this afternoon——" he faltered on the brink of paradise. "I've got to graduate, you know."

"What for?"

"I can't get a diploma unless I do."

"What in all the little green planets do you need a diploma for? To hang up in your office and show to out-of-town customers? You've got all there is out of college by now. But, of course, if you must wait I'll have to go back to San Francisco and fish out Mr. Blink."

"No you won't!" he declared savagely.

"Old Mr. Brutal!" she smiled adorably.

"But I haven't got a cent of money. Ma hates the sight of you and we can't live at the laundry."

"I've looked out for ev-erything," she said. "I've brought a hundred and twenty-eight dollars in my own little selfish purse."

"Check, please," said Chester A. Framm hoarsely to the waiter.

"We'd better hurry," Flossie reminded him. "The three-twelve is the only train out of here this afternoon."

How Chester A. Framm took his hand bag away from the Bon Ton Laundry is of historical importance, since it records one of those sorrows which seem to await upon a great joy.

"I've got to run to town for a couple of days," he told his mother sheepishly as he encountered her at the desk making out bills.

"Now, Ches? Right in the midst of all your work?"

"It's important."

He only knew that the three-twelve wouldn't wait and Floss was loving on schedule.

"Chester!" The great broad woman slid her spectacles over her gray hair and gave him such a look as he had never seen from her. "Has it got anything to do with that yellow-haired chit?"

"Miss Brannon, you mean?"

"If that's her silly name. I don't want you to go trifling with her any more. She stole your medal away from you and she'll steal your character. She's not for any young man's good. She paints her face and smokes cigareets and——"

He could hear the train tooting in the distance.

"Good-bye, mother," he roared, and went charging away toward his peculiar destiny.

As the train pulled out a lonesome figure could be seen at the end of the Dyak platform. Somber eyes fringed with lampblack were anxiously scanning each passing window.

"Poor Spig!" sighed Chester's sudden brideto-be, waving her hand toward one who, vanishing in distance, had recognized her a moment too late.

CHAPTER V

THE SHALLOWS OF HAPPINESS

"Kiss me quick and say you love me twice, rapidly," commanded Chester A. Framm's bride of three days; and when that was dispatched as per orders: "She is a terror, no mistake! And if I scream or she screams don't waste a minute—come a-running and pull me out. Good-by."

Thus she left him amid the somber glories of Aunt Het's parlor; he had a last fond glimpse of that small bright figure rounding the walnut newel post which pedestaled a brass knight with a gas lamp on the end of his spear. They had honeymooned three days in a remote San Francisco hotel, and this morning, their money nearing ebb tide, she had in jucted Chester to an example of those old-fashioned grip cars which used to run funicular-fashion up one of the steepest streets of the steepest city in America. The fog, which had grayed all the depressing high-stooped residences along their

ascent, had got into Chester's soul; all the way up Floss had cheered him with piratical anecdotes descriptive of Aunt Het's whimsies, which ended in revolting scenes, always signaled by a slight loosening of her false teeth.

An unpleasant Chinese butler had admitted them to an ornamented slate-colored residence near the top of the hill. Being deserted with orders to come a-running upon call Chester paced restlessly the full length of a vasty parlor which was a room-and-a-half tall, full of mortuary ornaments and tyrannized over by a lofty black mantel whose innumerable pillars, shelves, pagodas and bastions were thickly populated with gnomelike shapes of bric-à-brac. From a far-away end of the room a California pioneer, done in snowy marble, stared unfriendly from his pink plush pedestal.

Silence, slience everywhere. It was the tallest room Chester had ever seen, and aside from its depressing influences the bridegroom was a prey to troubled thoughts. What of his angry mother, and what of the high-souled Carlotta, equally deserted in this frenzy of young love? He had fed on honey dew and drunk the milk of paradise; a changed man he must be forevermore. But could he change? Would

Florabel, who obviously loved him well, demand that he should forget his ideals, desert his destiny?

He paused in his pacing to look at himself in one of Aunt Het's sky-aspiring mirrors. His hair trimmed, his scarf Floss-tied in the mode of the day, his imposing figure draped in a rather well-fitting suit of gray—he was already quite a different person from the young orator of Dyak. His appearance was, as Floss had termed it, "snappy"; and he wondered if he could stand himself that way. A life of serious application and of self-support had aged him beyond his years; you would have placed him at round thirty had you been there to appraise his business possibilities.

It seemed a fearful wait, down there in the mortuary parlor. What had the heartless Het chosen to do to his Flossie, whose poor weak hands were pitted unarmed against the dragon? Chester was nervous, as well he might be. The silence was unbearable.

"Hor-rors! Ho-lee hor-raws! Aw! Stop it! Aw-aw!"

It came in a frenzied scream from the upstairs apartments and caused an icy rill down the back of the anxious waiter upon trouble. His feet and his heart stood still at the same time. When warm blood would course again he tiptoed as far as the brass knight on the newel post and peered superstitiously up the stairs. An enormous red-and-green macaw sat on its perch at the first landing, its head upside down, one red eye fixed in critical scrutiny.

"Lord bless your life! Haw, haw!"

Chester breathed again. After all it was only the parrot; never a shriek, never a scream had sounded from his adored Floss or from the fire-devouring Het. But the incident had the effect of unnerving him completely. What sort of witch could it be that would keep this bird of evil a sentinel on the stairs? And what had he and Floss to hope from the offended monster lurking somewhere in her upper den?

"Oh, Goober! Goob!"

He was immensely relieved to hear Flossie's thrilling voice, clear and undiscouraged.

"Yes, darling!" he shouted up the stairs.

"You can come up now."

He took it at three leaps, evaded a savage peck from the parrot, and crushed his endangered bride in his arms.

"Don't," she whispered in an annoyed tone, and by the look of her face it was plain to be seen that the ordeal had been a hard one. "Just be natural and—come on!"

She led him into the chamber of torment. Blinking in the light of the big old-fashioned boudoir he was preparing to be natural when his calculations were quite shattered by the miracle which pounced out upon him. Something in a lacy coquettish garment had rushed from behind a screen and before he could take measures to defend himself someone had kissed him heartily on both cheeks. He beheld an elderly lady, about Floss-size, enameled and elaborately jeweled, grasping him by the elbows while her high cracked voice repeated.

"So this is the husband? I'm so relieved. You're not half so ugly as I thought you would be."

"Now, Aunt Het—you know I said he was the most bee-ootiful little old gigantic slob—"

Flossie's protest thoroughly established the marvel. So it was Aunt Het! But what had Floss been doing to her?

"As if I didn't have worries enough on my mind," she went right on with some monologue which apparently he had interrupted, "without you two things running off to a third rate preacher and getting married! If you had

come to me in the first place I'd have had the First Spiritualist Church with the Reverend Mr. Billings——"

"Aunt Het believes in 'em," explained Floss, indicating the Great Beyond.

"She believes in nothing," pronounced the old lady, folding her frivolous hands.

Chester thought it time to change the subject.

"We're—we're very grateful that you're not angry——"

"Angry?"

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He looked in alarm to see if her false teeth were dropping. They were firmly established and revealed by innumerable smiles. His wife's great-aunt had the Flossie look, faded but still girlish.

"What should I be angry about?"

"Well, when you saw Miss Brannon—Mrs. Framm—coming back married, you know——"

"I was never so relieved in my life."

"Oh."

"I could have danced with joy. Just to think—she's finally off my hands!"

This last was inspiring.

"If you'd only know what misery that girl has cost me!"

She sighed.

"But auntie, love," upspoke that girl, whose study of psychology had taught her at least to know the psychological moment, "the trouble's just begun."

"I thought so. Oliver came to me last night and told me to prepare." Oliver, it turned out, was her spirit guide.

Aunt Het sat down and Chester had a fearful feeling that the teeth had dropped the fraction of an inch.

"We haven't got the price of a hot tamale between us, Aunt Het," explained Chester's wife. "If we could live on love we'd just swell up and bust. But we can't."

"So you've come home to live on me?" The withered lady set her little mouth so that the index of her temper was invisible; yet there were signs of storm.

"Just temporarily, Aunt Het. You see my Goober's aw-fully talented. Aren't you, Cicero? And if you could just lend us a trunk room to sleep in and feed us any old scraps that Oscar doesn't want——"

Oscar being the parrot, that appeal was humble enough. "I don't intend to let you starve!" snapped the old lady, her frivolity

departed. "But what are the special talents of your—your Goober, as you call him?"

"He would do splendidly in the insurance business," was Flossie's quick diagnosis. Which was startling news to Chester A. Framm.

"But you don't know anybody in the insurance business—except Mr. Applethwaite."

"Old Mr. Blink? Yeppy. He's vice president of the Invisible Life and he can't refuse to give Chester a tiny little job."

"What?" There came an unmistakable rattling of ivory with the explosion. "Do you mean to say you would have the very poor taste to ask a favor of him—after the way you've treated and tormented and jilted him?"

"Course I would, old auntix! He told me eleven times in one evening that he loved me more than wealth or fame. I guess after that the least he could do would be to give my sweetheart a job."

"Well, of all the—" began Aunt Het, but failing in eloquence continued: "I should say that Mr. Applethwaite was about the most unlikely candidate in the field."

"Sure. And that's why I'm going to tackle him."

"Flossie," exclaimed her great-aunt, ac-

knowledging defeat in the last of a thousand things, "I sometimes think you're playing a system."

This was the manner of Chester A. Framm's introduction to life's real problems. He had always despised the wastrels who marry for wealth, but it would have taken a stretch of the imagination to have accused him of that. The cumbersome suite which Aunt Het gave them on the third floor was many degrees more exalted than a trunk room, and the food was surely not discarded by Oscar. Though their bedroom and parlor were cluttered with an overflow of curios from below, their quarters were comfortable beyond their foolish deserts. During the first uncertain weeks of married life Floss did many odd jobs in this small establishment, even washing clothes in the oldfashioned bathtub and on a wabbly gas jet heating over their breakfast, which came up on a tray. Aunt Het, who had buried three husbands, preferred to spend her mornings with Oscar the parrot and a mixed company of loved ones from the Beyond. It was a comfortable, patronizing arrangement which at first chafed the pride of Framm. That pride

grew callous beyond ordinary chafings, as we are yet to see.

They had scarcely carried their limited baggage to the temporary quarters and hung their clothes in two of the looming spirit cabinets when Floss set herself to a talent which had been revealed during the honeymoon. She took off her hat and trimmed it. Back in Dyak days Chester had often wondered at her profusion of millinery; matrimonial experience taught him that she could entirely alter the appearance of her headdress in less time than it takes most women to comb their hair.

On this pioneer day Floss went upstairs wearing a blue feather. Five minutes later she was standing in front of a ramshackle mirror trying on a lacy turban with silver braid wound round and round. This was Chester's purely untechincal impression as he sat on the edge of the bed and reflected that his wife's appearance was modish in the extreme. Tight waists were being worn in that period of the world's history, and Floss could make herself very slim at midlady without extravagant lacings.

"Are you going to see this—this Blink now?" inquired her husband, nervously admiring the flash of her wonderful complexion in the mir-

ror as she stood there patting her honey-colored hair and perking from side to side.

"You'll notice I'm wearing a plain blue walking suit," she soliloquized, "gently outlining the figure and showing a touch of scarlet at the throat. He was always crazy about me in blue—poor thing! What were you saying, Goober?"

"Are you going to see this Mr. Blink right away?"

"Yeah." She spoke it casually, her mouth being full of pins. It was as though he had asked her if she was going to walk or take a street car.

"But, precious—I'm not sure I shall care about the insurance business."

He had to wait for his reply until she had used all the pins on her lace collar.

"I'm not frenzied about it either. But what are we going to do? We can't start right in making orations. I don't know of anybody getting rich out of that—except the man who sells soap on the street in front of the City Library." Suddenly she dropped a bar pin, the convertible hat and a scrap of silk as, turning round, she faced her Chester with an expression of divine guidance.

"Cicero!" she crowed. "Speaking of the City Library and the soap—I've got an idea!"

"We need one," said he. "What is it?"

"Nope, I shan't tell you until you're polite."

"I'm polite," he protested, trying to kiss her. "What's the idea?"

"Nope. It's got to cook until it's tender."

When she had resumed her hat he took her as far as the corner, but there she pointed him west as she turned east.

"Aunt Het won't give us any lunch," she decreed. "But if you'll meet me at the Poodle Dog—half past twelve—I'll tell you about Mr. Blink and what he says."

"The Poodle Dog? Do you think we ought to eat at those expensive places when we're nearly broke?"

"Course we ought!" She opened wide her golden eyes at the very idea. "Why, Gooball the scientists say that if paupers were better nourished there wouldn't be any poverty or crimes. Now run along and think hard."

Any town looks cold to the unemployed. San Francisco, which has harbored many galleons out of strange seas, was once accused by a poet of being serene, indifferent to fate. I have

never found it to be either, but the forenoons there are clammy, especially on the shady side of the street. At least this was the case in my day, which was Chester's day; indeed I have no reason to think that the famous fire and—I almost said earthquake—ever altered that aspect of Nature.

Coming out of a warm California valley into this inspiring fog belt Chester was obliged to turn up his coat collar as he walked. Trudging along, shivering, blue, he was the picture of one who had lost his soul's wish to gain his heart's desire. He was in a strange flux of happiness and misery. Could he ever make peace with his offended mother? Apparently not. The Widow Framm, he knew by experience, loved and hated like an Indian. Lost in the roses of his misfit romance he felt the scratch of the thorns at every step. If there be a difference between love and infatuation he was infatuated more than he was in love. At any rate, that peculiar composition of fluff and mockery whom he called his wife now filled every crevice of his heart. He would do anything for Floss.

Anything, did he say?

He stopped on the edge of a down-shooting

street corner and considered his case. For him. so it seemed, she had given up one of the richest men in San Francisco. And for her he had sworn to trample out, destroy forever that one talent which is death to hide. Less than an hour before the hasty marriage ceremony she had burst into a flood of hysterical tears and declared that she wouldn't marry him unless he swore never, never to make a public speech without her knowledge and consent. The impassioned Chester had sworn. Was it an ingrowing jealousy of Carlotta Beam that possessed her or was she obtuse to his true merit? Both, probably. At any rate, since love was not all in his book of life he was resolved to wear down her prejudice as soon as they were on their feet financially, and take up the study of the law after work hours. For Chester A. Framm had no intention of sacrificing his genius at the altar of Aphrodite.

At length his wanderings got him down to Market Street within sight of the dingy, ponderous dome of the old City Hall. The official sight reminded him bitterly of his greatness, now in a state of suspended animation. He walked along the vistas of Pompeian grandeur, marking the stream of hard-faced lawyers passing in and of soft-faced politicians passing out. Some came in rich carriages, others afoot—mostly afoot. The men whose countenances he so wistfully examined scarcely pleased him as types; very little statesmanship here, he concluded, and was about to pass on when a black-sanded sign with gold letters caught his eye—Public Library.

So this was the place where, according to Floss's naïve suggestion, he might employ his oratory in the humble trade of selling soap. He glanced morbidly over the cobbled streets, but nothing of the soapy spellbinder was to be seen. Chester paused and regarded the black-sanded sign. Public Library. After all, he had nearly two hours on his hands. Surely Floss could not object to his employing his odd time in his favorite study.

He obeyed the impulse, went in, picked out a broad volume entitled Speakers Past and Present, and with this stole guiltily into the reading room. There was an available oak table near the window, with one industrious female crouching over her book; and in this comparative solitude Chester opened Speakers Past and Present at the logical place, the Preface. It turned out to be a set of biographical sketches,

limited to Speakers of the Assembly at Sacramento. Chester sighed. Fate was against him. Therefore he closed the volume in some disgust and had barely looked up when the studious female at the other end of the table looked up also. Their dream-filled eyes met.

Horn of judgment! It was Carlotta Beam! Chester, who was no coward, would have run away, carrying the book, the table, the library wall with him in headlong flight. But man, having outgrown the honest direct methods of the rhinoceros, has schooled himself to sit pat in the face of an embarrassing situation. Chester's eyes were on Carlotta, Carlotta's on Chester. The more he looked the more confused it all became, because Miss Beam, if she had been hurt by his elopement from Dyak, was indeed concealing it bravely. He had never before seen her naturally serious face wear so bright a smile as she showed him when, closing her book, she came over to his chair.

"Chester!" she cried. "Isn't this miraculous!

I hadn't the least idea——"

"Sh-h-h!"

An old gentleman at the next table uttered this rattlesnake's warning as he pointed to a large sign—No Conversation.

Whereat Chester rose limply and whispered "Outside."

As they went to the entrance and stood leaning against the coping Chester was sure she was looking unusually well; there was a little color in her sallow cheeks and her dark eyes lingered fondly upon him. "If you only realized it," she smiled happily, "it was you who brought me up to San Francisco."

"Me!" he gasped, wondering if she was about to take legal steps to separate him from Floss.

"Your graduation speech. I happened to remember an incident in the life of Burke which would fit splendidly into your theme. It wasn't in the college library, so I took the first train to—— Chester, what in the world's the matter?"

When he had partly returned to his senses he was aware that she was holding him up against the stone lintel of the entrance. San Francisco was going round and round, and in the confusion of architecture, hills, street cars, lawyers—he could see her face, deathly pale, peering at him.

"What's wrong? What have you done? What——"

"Carlotta, haven't you heard?" he managed

to say; but already he had clinched the steel for a blow.

"I only knew you'd gone away. Your mother---"

"I'm not coming back. I'm sorry, Carlotta. I'll never make any speech. That's all over."

"Chester, I can't understand. You were going ahead with everything last week. If you think I've interfered too much——"

"You would have been the making of me," he murmured; "of me or any other man."

The heartfelt praise had gone well over her tragic head, it seemed, for her face tightened and her dark eyes were regarding him with a look which was hells deep in its scorn.

"Why aren't you coming back? What have you done?"

"I ran away and—got married."

She paused just a second.

"Oh."

"Florabel Brannon."

It was brief and straight to the sharpened point which he dug into her heart.

"I didn't know—you would go that way," she told him in the queerest tone in the world; and without another word she walked down the stone steps.

Her exit from his life was as somber and as proud as the departure of Medea from Jason's unworthy palace.

"Car-"

He tried to call after her, but his throat was ashes.

At half past twelve he hunted up the expensive Poodle Dog and found Floss accusing him out of her brilliant eyes.

"Do you know what you look like?" she asked. "You look the way The Lost Chord sounds on a jew's-harp—sort of thin and sour. I've had a bum morning too. Poor Mr. Blink cried when I told him. I hate to make a fat man cry. He's got a sort of absorbent complexion, you know—seems to take up moisture like a blotter. Aren't you most starved?"

"I guess so," mumbled the happy groom. "What about my job?"

"Oh, yes. I got so sorry for Mr. Blink that I nearly forgot to ask him. But it's all settled. Twenty a week to begin with. Start work Monday."

Aunt Het had been right when she had accused Floss of playing a system.

CHAPTER VI

BOTTLED BLUSHES

It was an early morning in June, at about the time when Chester came to the conclusion that he hated Mr. Blink almost as much as he loved the little imp who had introduced him to the monster. Dressed for the office the budding insurance man sat fussing with a soft-boiled egg. Flossie never seemed to wake up cross; and at this moment she was singing as she pinned on a morning cap made last night from an old lace handkerchief and rosettes devised from scraps of lingerie ribbon. So fresh she looked and so blooming and rosy you would never have thought that she had anything on her mind weightier than the impromptu trifle.

For her Goober's benefit she was buttering a slice of toast, which she had warmed over a patent gas toaster, smuggled in under Aunt Het's very nose. Chester was considering his case again.

"It's that orator who stands in front of the

Public Library selling soap," she said apropos of nothing. "He's been arrested again. As though it could be a crime to sell soap anywhere, even in church."

"You had some sort of idea connected with the Public Library, didn't you?" asked her husband, fishing for a scrap of eggshell as though to remove from his life an unpleasant memory.

"Do you feel pretty well, Goober? Sort of strong and powerful and ready to receive?" she inquired, handing him over his toast.

"Receive what?" Floss' method of attack was making him wary.

"Oh, everything—strokes of lightning and things."

"You haven't got me a job selling soap in front of the library?" he temporized.

"Old Brutal! You couldn't do that—you're not eloquent enough."

"Thanks. However, I'm pretty strong this morning."

"Huroo! Then I've got our future all in a wad."

She went capering over to one of Aunt Het's hermaphrodite bookcases and out of a walnut drawer she brought a scrap of paper which looked as though it had been torn from Noah's own notebook. She dropped it beside the tray.

"What's this?" asked the enamored one, trying to look practical, which was impossible because she had got behind him and was tucking the ends of his necktie into his collar. The scrap of paper, he could see, was ruled in blue lines and all scribbled over with faded ink.

"Old Nuisance! That's my complexion."
"Your which?"

He tried to disentangle the arms round his neck, for her complexion was at that instant in a most unseeable position, its round little chin balanced against the top of his head.

"We've got to get rich, Goober," she decided a moment later, as soon as she had nestled her complexion into the hollow of his shoulder and was in a position to speak down his collar. "We've got to make millions and squillions so that we can drive round town in a golden chariot and show the diamond settings in our teeth to the poor. The poky old insurance won't give us a decent salary until we're too old and sensible to care about money. Besides, you'll never succeed in the insurance business."

"Why not, cutie?"

"Because you're not a good enough talker." He winced.

"Thanks again," he said.

"You know, Goober, there's more than one woman in the world who can teach you to hit the high places—"

Good heavens! How like a burlesque of Carlotta's ideal!

"I'm not going to let my candy husband play second trombone to anybody, not in all this awful big green world," the childish innocence of her voice went on. "I'm going to make a regular normulous hit out of my Goober. I want to see my sweetheart's picture stuck up on every billboard all over the universe. And I'm the girl that can put it there."

"Of course you can. I'm sure you can," he said in the tone of the half convinced.

"I don't mean Shakespere or any of those mighty uggles. But I can make Goober so great he'll just pop out of his clothes."

"But how about your complexion?" he insisted, being ever logical. Her stranglehold permitted him to peep down at the scrap of paper whose brownish script looked like a recipe for an English plum pudding.

"It's ev-erything," she told him in her best baby drawl.

"Not going on the stage?"

"Horrid old stage. Nopey, nopey! I wouldn't just even think of such a thing."

"But you can't take your complexion off and sell it." Which was rather a light sally for Chester A. Framm.

"Now, Cicero! We've been married most two months. Where do you think my complexion comes from?"

The suggestion gave him a shock. On a bureau beyond the bedroom door he caught a glimpse of the white jars and frivolous bottles whose uses he had never looked into. He remembered his mother's diatribe to the effect that the yellow-haired chit painted and powdered and smoked cigarettes.

"All women use cold cream," he loyally insisted to the cheek so tightly pressed against his.

"Old Sillicum!"

"Florabel!" He spoke it sternly. "Let me look at you."

She stood away for inspection. Mona Lisa never did a better bit of smiling than did Florabel Framm as she folded her white and useless hands across the fluffy front of her peignoir and turned her sweet cheeks slowly—now right, now left. Perfection! Does Nature rouge the

tea rose or rice-powder the early mignonette? Her cheeks held the same color that he had first noticed in them the day he led her along the footpath behind the bleachers—cheeks of a small child playing in the wind.

"Floss," he cried, "either you're a little fraud or a great artist."

"I ain't neither of those things," she chirped. "I'm a great chemist, that's what I am."

"You're a great something, that's sure," he admitted—and that is about as far as his diagnosis got in all his married life.

"Angel Bloom Complexion Cream," she rattled on. "That's the name I got for it. It's invisible, you know—just sort of oozes through the way currant jelly shows under whipped cream."

"Who ever told you all that?"

"My grandmother. She was so famous for her complexion that two or three army officers shot themselves—or each other, I've forgotten which—just because she was so adorable. When I was eleven years old and went down to visit her in Roanoke she told me right straight on her deathbed—it was a sort of a deathbed, because she never got up for ten years, except once when she went to a horse race—she told me all about Angel Bloom and said it was nev-er, nev-er too early to begin to be fascinating."

"And she wrote it out for you?"

"It's all down there in her handwriting."

Grandmother certainly wrote an obscure hand. After a session of eye strain he managed to make out such phrases as "slow fire" and "be sparing with suet," which sounded to him not in the least complexional.

"So that's the idea," he grunted, not thinking much about it one way or the other.

"Yeah; that and my complexion."

"Your complexion?"

"Can't you see what a fine ad it would make, Goob? I've got the loveliest coloring in America, on or off the stage. Now that point's settled. Well, we're a corporation—the Framm Complexion Company Ink."

"Company what?"

"Ink," she chimed. "They always stick that on corporations to make them sound honest. I've made you president and I'll be secretary, treasurer and general manager——"

"Don't let's talk nonsense, darling," he warned her from his lofty height.

"I don't know how," she replied just as though she meant it. "I know you're just itching to get down to the insurance. But just look what I made."

This time she fished under the Bagdad cover of a divan, and the object she produced was three feet long and of limp cardboard. It was a sorrowful inspection he gave the work of art. He hadn't thought even Floss would have the heart to do that—and her best, her reverenced, her adored photograph! It was the picture she had given him on the day of their wedding, showing Florabel in an evening gown, her hair done in a Psyche knot, and with that piquant smile on her kissable mouth.

"Well, what will you be doing next?" he groaned. This of course was an unfair question.

She had pasted the photograph in the very center of the composition and surrounded it with a legend printed out in her ill-formed letters.

DON'T YOU LOVE A PEACH?

That was the challenge above the photograph, and below:

I'M THE FRAMM COMPLEXION GIRL

ANGEL BLOOM CREAM DID IT

TRY ME

50C INSIDE

"I like it all but the 'Try me. Fifty cents inside,' " she said, perking her head critically. "That sounds too much like selling tickets to typhoid germs. Isn't it soo-purb?"

"It's superbly idiotic," he groaned.

"That's what's so charming about it. And I've saved sixty dollars out of your wages. That'll pay for the first advertising. Then you'll resign from the insurance and——"

"See here, Floss!" Here sounded the first note of a lover's quarrel. "There's got to be a limit somewhere. I'm willing to drop my ambitions and go into business for you; I'm willing to work and slave for you; but I'll be perpetually damned if I'm going to let you turn me into a hairdresser."

"There's oodles of money in hairdressing," she pointed out quite placidly. "But you wouldn't make such a good one as you would before I made you get a haircut."

She was combing her fingers through his

shorn locks when he prevented her gently but firmly and put on his hat.

"You haven't even kissed me once," she pouted at the door. He paused long enough to attend to that.

Chester took his way toward the Invisible Life Insurance Company every morning with the feelings of a man whom someone has pleasantly drugged, then sent to slow torment. All through the day he was baited along by the idea "I'm doing it for Floss," and the thought helped speed him through the heavy seas of figures which were deadly dull to the oratorical mind. Sometimes Satan would walk in through the prosperous glass-and-mahogany partitions and remind him of his better self—the self which Carlotta, had he chosen, might be even now lifting upward, upward to the heights where thought is golden and speech is inspired.

Sometimes in the hall Chester would encounter Graham V. Applethwaite, the gentleman whom Florabel had boiled down to Mr. Blink, then discarded. He was a swollen old bachelor who rather resembled our popular idea of a trust save for the fact that his eyes were entirely concealed behind plate-glass spectacles.

When he met his earnest employee, if he saw him at all, he would give him a charitable, patronizing smile, a smile which crushed. Chester hated it. It would be well if all unsuccessful lovers could adopt toward their victors a smile like Mr. Blink's.

In his work Chester had no compass whereby to guide him. He merely knew that he got through the days and fairly ran home to Floss, who always had a program arranged for the evening and never allowed him much time to think. Sometimes they would spend the evening playing poker with young things of Floss' own caliber. Floss, who played like a prodigal, usually won, which balanced things for him at the end of the week. Often they would go to the theater with Aunt Het, who always bought the tickets and insisted on vaudeville or musical comedy with an occasional dash of burlesque; the Spirit World seldom interfered with her earthly pleasures. She was an incorrigible trifler, was Aunt Het, and as such seldom failed to make herself amusing.

But the week following the interview in which Floss elected her Chester to the presidency of the Framm Complexion Company Ink, found little Mrs. Framm disinclined to amuse-

ments in the after-dinner hours. She looked actually tired. Once she appeared with her useless forefinger tied up in a cotton rag; she consented to having it unwrapped and showed a long savage burn which she wanted kissed so that it would get well. A sweetish, not unpleasant odor seemed to overhang the atmosphere in their third-floor suite. He never remembered Floss' using such a perfume—and so much of it.

One morning Chester's bare toe came painfully against some brittle object which seemed to have popped out from under the bed. It was a long-necked, round-bellied bottle, a silly thing with roses blown into the glass.

"How did this get here?" he asked, holding it up.

"It just would," drawled Floss from her pillows. This was one of the times when she wouldn't get up.

"Looks sort of funny to me," he growled, for he was entertaining his suspicions.

"Maybe I'm a secret drunkard," said she.
"But I never could make out how anybody could be a secret drunkard—I can always smell it a block off. Kiss me, nuisance, and please don't slam the door when you go out."

It was on his way home that very night that some fate caused him to stare into the vulgar solution of his mystery. On one of the sidehill streets at a corner less than two blocks from Aunt Het's abode there stood an old-fashioned drug store of about the third grade. It had a handsome sign lettered Holbetter's Pharmacy and a gilded mortar and pestle over the door. The place was in a basement, two steps down from the sidewalk, and its cramped proportions plainly indicated Doctor Holbetter's status in the apothecarial world.

Fate reminded Chester of a tube of tooth paste. He paused. There is no druggist, be he ever so humble, who does not handle tooth paste. Chester A. Framm got his eyes as far as the scrawny show window, and then came recognition. It was as though he had found a friend in the morgue. A dozen round-bellied, long-necked bottles, similar to the one he had kicked under his wife's bed, stood boldly in a row. A large window card printed in red and white occupied the place of honor at center—Flossy's picture!

Don't You Love a Peach?

It was printed in black and red and had the look of permanency and authority which bold-face type is apt to give. The Framm Complexion Girl was announced in all her impudence, but her unsatisfactory line about Try Me had been dignified and repressed to Trial Size, 50c.

Chester went into the shabby interior, and assuming the guilty nonchalance of a detective brought forth the proprietor, who came briskly out from behind a weather-beaten glass screen. He was a leathery little mild-featured gentleman who affected the style of hair and goatee made famous by the late Colonel Cody.

The druggist, who proved to be Doctor Holbetter himself, chewed nervously as he served his customer with an obsolete brand of tooth paste.

"By the way," drawled Chester, trying to look innocent as he pocketed his change, "what's this complexion stuff you're showing in the window?"

"Angel Bloom?" The druggist had a nervous, staccato delivery, punctuated by a click-clicking sound which he made in the side of his cheek as though urging a tired horse, "Latest thing. Yes, sir. Lady to improve and

beautify? Can't do better. Guaranteed." Click-click.

"A new thing?"

"Absolutely. Only put it out yesterday. Sold four bottles right off the reel. Theatrical people."

"Your own invention, I suppose?"

Doctor Holbetter had now rounded the counter and taken a bottle from the row in the window.

"All we've got in stock." Click-click. He tipped the bottle to show its contents, which were pinkish in color and of the consistency of skim milk. "Interest in the concern. Discovered by a lady. Secret formula. See her picture in the window? Pretty good! With a face like that she could sell ham in a synagogue. Real nice lotion. Serious medicine. Merit in it. Wholesale, proper advertising—"

"I've got plenty at home," said Chester, backing away from the bottle which the druggist was evidently trying to force on him.

"Never regret it. Actress came in for second bottle. Wanted it for sister. Just get this thing on the wholesale——"

Flossie on the wholesale! That was the way her shocked husband took it as he charged home

and found her serenely ripping the fur from a hat he didn't recognize. She sat by a window and the gold of a late afternoon was mingling with the gold of her hair, which was slightly tousled. The strips of fur, as she ripped them off the frame, made exciting sounds like explosions of distant firecrackers. Her eyes were downcast; she was in a dream. Women engaged with fancywork always look like Madonnas.

"See here, Floss," was the way Framm burst into the picture, "who's that man, Holbetter?"

"Buffalo Willie, you mean?" asked she, pressing a velvet rose with her thumb against the frame as she held the confection at arm's length and considered the effect. "Why, he's vice president of the Ink."

"H-m. Apparently you and your Buffalo Willie are doing splendidly with this thing you call your Ink."

"Don't be jealous, Old Brutal. We've made you president, you got to admit. Don't you remember away back in Dyak how you longed to be President?"

Another dig at the late Carlotta apparently. "Your picture in a drug-store window!" he

snorted. "Why didn't you put yourself in a circus poster and be done with it?"

"I thought of that." She had apparently decided on the velvet rose, for she was now sewing it rapidly to the brim. "But when you make circus posters you've got to have money for regular art. What we need's capital, Goob. So I went round to the printer with my sixty dollars. He soaked me twenty-two for fifty printed cards. I wanted to have my picture in colors, but he said that would mean lithography. Every kind of graphy is horrid expensive, so I just painted my photos with water colors and pasted 'em onto the cards. You know they're pretty. You told me once that my picture was lovelier than Venus or ice cream or anything. Didn't you?"

"Well, what if I did?"

Wasn't that like Floss?

"Come here and kiss me twice." He did, and as usual experienced her charm. "How did you like our Angel Bloom?"

"It's all right, I guess. But what is it? Where did it come from?"

"I cooked it over the gas heater. I nearly burned the house down two or three times it was more fun. And then I didn't have any bottles or labels and things. So I went round to Doctor Holbetter—he admits he's a doctor—and made him vice president. It seems he had a hundred and forty-four empty bottles out back of the store. They used to contain Holbetter's Canine Flea Solution. It seems that dogs don't have that kind of flea any more, so Buffalo Willie was holding those empties till he thought up some other wonderful invention. I told the old darling all about Angel Bloom and he promised to give me twelve dozen empties for one dozen fulls. Isn't he a sweetheart?"

The druggist, as Chester recalled him, had been a withered remnant reeking of aloes, suggestive of mummification.

"And oh, my own indispensable Goob!" She had scattered her trimming to the four winds, and flying to him had thrown herself into his lap. "I'm oozing ideas. The big Boston Drug Store on Kearney Street have promised to take two dozen and my picture for their window. I've been filling bottles all day in the factory—"

"Factory?"

"The trunk room, foolish!"

With a uselessly slippered toe she indicated

the little room that had been smelling of strange scents this mysterious week.

"How much does it cost you to make the stuff?" he solemnly inquired.

"Twenty-one cents a bottle. It wholesales for twenty-four."

"Well then, you'll clear four dollars and thirty-two cents, maybe, if you can sell the whole gross," he encouraged her, after computation.

"Lunk!" she whispered.

"Am I wrong?"

"Yeppy. We ain't going to be wholesalers until we're big and strong."

"What are we going to be?"

"It's won-derful, Cicero! I've got our whole life settled. We're going to move into a cute little flat over a store—Framm's Angel Bloom Parlor—and folks will come from miles round asking, 'Who is this complexion girl?' and I'll come out with a bottle in each hand and say, 'Only me!' Isn't it all too lovely for words?"

"Yes, indeed! And who's going to pay the rent on this paradise?"

"Oh, you and me and Buffalo Willie."

"I see. And just what status will I have round the place?"

"Why, Goober! Haven't you guessed?" "Can't imagine."

"You're going to be the cheese. You'll wear a new necktie every hour and show the ladies round the place and bring me out as a sample. Don't you savvy? I'm planning this all for vour dear little sweet sake."

"By Jupiter!" He came standing and shook her off his lap.

"You're getting mad again," she discovered,

pouting slightly.

"I'll not do it!" he roared. "I simply won't have anything to do with this silly, undignified, dishonest performance. I simply won't, that's all!"

CHAPTER VII

CASTAWAYS

But what does one do when Fate is fighting on the other side? Fight on and be defeated or accept the alternative, which is disarmament.

It was on a Wednesday when Chester A. Framm frowned upon the sacrilege in Doctor Holbetter's grubby show window. Thursday dawned bright and fair, with Chester already ashamed of his loss of temper. Flossie never lost her temper; she was very patient with him. He couldn't bear to go away and leave those ill words behind. Therefore their morning's reconciliation was heartfelt and long. Flossie cried quite becomingly, thus mangling his soul to a shapeless substance as though it had been run through a meat chopper. grew eloquent in his descriptions of the kinds of brute he had been. She admitted it and punctuated her protestations of love with little heart-tearing sobs.

Chester was late at the office, but he got there warm with the knowledge that Flossie was the dearest thing in all the world and that he would do anything for her short of becoming one of those damned hairdressers.

In the early afternoon as he was coming back from his cheap and hurried luncheon he thought he saw a flash of her pinkish gown ruffling its way into a trolley car at the corner beyond the Indivisible Life Building. The fact that she wore an unfamiliar hat merely established her identity. He was intending to twit her of it, jokingly of course, but that night when he reached their upstairs apartment he found her dramatic with a most unusual caution.

"Hush!" she whispered. "Aunt Het!"

"Aunt Het-is she sick?"

"Yeppy. Sick of us."

"What have we done?"

"Better take off your shoes, sly like a mouse. Put on your felt slippers and give me a cigarette."

She tiptoed over and locked the door, then settled down on the divan, her eyes wide and scared.

"Her false teeth came clean plumb out so

at I could see the plate—you know the way ley make 'em to look like the roof of your outh. She called you an idler!"

"That's nice." He had been running errands or Flossie's rejected lover all day and every uscle ached for rest. "Reasonable of her, m sure."

"No, it ain't. But Aunt Het hasn't got to reasonable. She's a Baha worshiper."

"What's a Baha worshiper?"

"Some sort of religion you get in Southern alifornia. It makes people awfully funny. ast night she got a vision and it said you were minor astrolabe. Of course that cooks your cose. She came round with a regular scene. he wants im-mediate payment for a month's pard and lodging——"

"Are we that far behind?" gasped Chester, ther vague as to their arrangements.

"Well, we would have been bang up to the ratch if I hadn't spent that sixty dollars on rugs and chemicals."

Numerous empty, full and half-full Angel loom bottles strewed the place and told the le of extravagance.

"Is she going to put us out?" he asked uxiously.

"Not necessarily. When we go down to dinner we'll just be chickadees. Maybe she'll blow over. You can't imagine how many times Aunt Het's blown over."

"You'll get round her," he beamed, justified in admiring Flossie's powers of get-roundness.

They dined in the big lofty room whose main adornments consisted of oil paintings of Aunt Het's three late husbands. These were a study in progressive styles. Number One showed a wide open collar and chin beard, Number Two wore drooping mustaches and a bang; while Number Three was smooth-shaven and by his manner of dress appeared quite recent. Whiskered or smooth, they had all gone their way, and their common widow, still going strong, appeared promptly at seven to take her place at the head of the table.

She looked calm, Chester thought as he pushed her chair in for her. During these months he had grown to regard her as a rollicking sort of person, rather fond of cheap red wine and only queer as to her parrot and her spirit guides, who seemed inoffensive companions.

"Chester," she said as soon as her woeful Chinaman had brought in the soup, "what is it you have on your feet when you come up the stairs in the afternoon? Roller skates?"

Chester blushed.

"I wasn't aware—" he began with dignity.

"He's never aware, Aunt Het," chipped in his child wife. "That's exactly what makes him the adorable Goob."

"You shouldn't take such things so lightly," the old woman uttered the rebuke. Apparently the adorable Goob sounded like one of the gods of her theology. "But I shouldn't be disturbed at half past five in the afternoon.

"You must attend to your shoes, Chester. Possibly they need oiling."

"I sometimes have a touch of nerves myself," he agreed, remembering Flossie's formula—Be natural.

"Who ever said anything about my nerves?"
Her eyes had hardened to small twinkling
dots and her teeth were dropping, dropping—
a most alarming sight.

"I—I wasn't intending any offense," he tried to apologize. "We all have our nerves."

"What have you to be nervous about?" she glared.

What had come over the woman? Since last he had seen her she had changed from an

amiable frivolous thing to the monster he now beheld.

"Well, my work-"

"Work! Do you call what you're doing work?"

"I'm always anxious to get something better." Chester was game to the last.

"I'll thank you not to mention my nerves hereafter!" she took him up short. "What's my religion for, I should like to know?"

Chester, who had no power of enlightening her, held his peace. But the moment was horrible.

"There's the fun-niest pair of acrobats at the Orpheum," Flossie struck bravely in, quite easily pretending that all was well as could be.

"What can they do?" inquired Aunt Het; and this was all the more astonishing because her look became tranquil as the harvest moon.

"They pretend to be strong men," she giggled. "One of them picks up a thousand-pound weight between his teeth, and just when you think he's going to crack his spinal column he drops it—the weight, I mean—and it turns out to be rubber. And then his partner comes on and lifts him right up over his head—all with one hand. He does this nine or ten times.

He's attached to a pulley, don't you know. It's too grand!"

"Let's go," suggested Flossie's astonishing great-aunt; and at that moment she and her niece looked enough alike to be twins.

The diverting swindles committed to fast music by the Rubberneck Tramps at the Orpheum restored Aunt Het to her happy self again, but Chester's heart was as ice. What calamity did her recent storm portend? She had made it plain enough that the love birds in her estimation were far less welcome in her home than was Oscar the parrot. An uncertain twenty dollars a week stood between them and starvation. And there was nothing in the world to prove that Chester had made good at the insurance business.

Next morning, Friday, it was cold. He took his foggy self down to the Indivisible office and had mourned two hours over his desk before he was brought to by the voice of the sleek blond secretary, a bearer of Friday's tidings.

"Wanted in Mr. Applethwaite's office."

Chester's trembling knees got him as far as the pompous mahogany desk above which the upper part of Mr. Applethwaite's body loomed like a bust of Plutocracy. Mr. Blink's face wore its customary patronizing smile. It is a peculiar sensation to be thus outfaced by one's wife's rejected lover.

"Er—Mr. Framm," the great man went straight to the point, "I don't think we can use you any longer. Er——"

"You mean I'm dismissed!" gasped the unfortunate.

"Well, yes. I should say you're being dismissed. Possibly some time in the future—"

Chester's feet seemed nailed to the floor. Mr. Blink was squinting into the papers on his desk and there appeared nothing for it but to go.

"This is pretty sudden, Mr. Applethwaite," the dismissed one was so rash as to declare.

"Yes. Isn't it?" Merely a passing comment on the weather.

"Might I ask if I have given satisfaction?"
"You might."

"Of course if I haven't I should like to know so that next time—"

"Please don't worry about that point." The sweetish old face writhed itself into a smile. "I'm sure you've been quite satisfactory. Good day, Mr. Framm."

When Chester got down into windy Market

Street he had an impulse to go back to Dyak and implore forgiveness at his mother's ironing board. The mood passed. As a matter of fact wild horses could not have dragged him away from the younger Mrs. Framm. But how was he to face her? How could he tell her that he had made a failure of the only possible work that could keep them from starvation? Then resentment got him by the throat. It served him right for twisting himself into that which he was not, for jilting his destiny—jilting Carlotta.

He had sought the cheap success from which she would have warned him.

It was no great walk back to Aunt Het's house. His mood, attuned to the whistling of the wind, got him as far as Holbetter's Pharmacy before he looked round for his bearings. Turning the hilly corner he came in sight of that high-stooped ornate façade behind which he and Flossie had passed the first fevered months of their married life.

The exterior of Aunt Het's house looked more cluttered than usual. The cause was apparent at a glance. A large moving van and a dirty one-horse hack were standing against the curb. Vainly struggling with his apprehension Chester almost ran toward the inscrutable group. Behind the van a man in overalls was just shoving a table under the sheltering canopy. It was the very marble-topped monstrosity that had held his breakfast tray these troubled months!

Flossie's stylish figure was seen coming briskly down the steps, her left hand carrying her small walrus-leather bag, her right clasping Chester's shabby suitcase.

"Hello, Goob!" she cried, cheerful as a cricket.

"Floss! What's happened?"

"Aunt Het's blown up," replied his adorable torment. "And we're being evicted."

"Oh, yes," agreed her husband with frightful calm. "And who's paying for this van?"
"Aunt Het."

"By gad, it's an outrage! I'll see her about this. I'll—"

"Don't let's make any false motions," she suggested. "We've got an awful lot to do. She was very sweet and insulting and generous. She gave me all the old furniture she couldn't use. Besides, you can't see her. She's locked in with a trance medium."

"Where does she expect us to go now?"

"Oh, that's all fixed. Your hay fever'll get bad again standing here in the wind. Come on."

"Where?"

The van began to move away. Flossie had half pushed him into the depths of the cab. With one foot on the curb she paused and called an Eddy Street number to the man on the box.

But when they had gone far on their pilgrimage into the unknown he broke down and blurted: "Floss, what are we going to do? I'm fired. Fired cold!"

"There, there! Did bad Blink go and hurt my Goober? Don't you give one solitary whoop, Old Nuisance!"

She had taken his head in her arms and was soothing it against her soft vivacious breast.

"'Cause who cares? We don't. We're glad, that's what we are."

"But what are we going to do?" he repeated, absolutely vanquished.

Her reply, if she had intended any, was interrupted by the behavior of the hack. It stopped as though by appointment with a gild-

ed street number twinkling through the gray afternoon. Floss had opened the door, permitting her husband to crane his neck a little farther. It was a small two-story shop building which he saw, a trim front newly painted in dazzling white. Through the plaster-splattered panes he could dimly see carpenters at work with fresh shelving. But it was the sign, daintily lettered in colonial type on the white board over the door, which held him with a wild surmise!

"Framm's Angel Bloom Shop"

"Come on, Cicero," said the great man's wife, leading him by the hand as a nurse leads a timid child. "There's the dearest house-keeping apartment upstairs, and we'll paint Aunt Het's furniture so its mother wouldn't know it."

"Floss," he said; and barred her way. "I believe you got old Applethwaite to fire me."

"Do you?" Her face was aglow with what at that moment looked like pride and affection.

Lumbering down Eddy Street he could see the moving van, replete with furniture which Aunt Het—despite her berserk rage—had contributed. "Floss," he persisted, "I wonder if I'll ever get used to you."

"If you do," she warned him, "I'll get a

divorce."

CHAPTER VIII

BUFFALO WILLIE DESCENDING TO TACKS

It was in the fall and Chester A. Framm had just got back from Los Angeles after a moderately successful tour introducing Framm's Magic Hair Gloss together with the now standardized Angel Bloom Cream. Shamelessly, too, he had overseen the distribution of Flossie's latest advertising novelty entitled Mr. Framm Knows a Pretty Girl When He Sees One. The poster showed Chester at center-card holding hands with the Venus de Milo-artfully provided with white-gloved arms-and with Miss Vivian Hussel, the most popular beauty on the American musicalcomedy stage. Vivian had been harder to coax into the picture than had Venus, but Floss had seen to it in her own sweet way.

On the morning of his return to San Francisco he had again been astonished, for the black-and-white front of the beauty shop, over which he had presided with capable efficiency,

was undergoing another change. A house painter on his ladder occupied a prominent place outside the show window, whose sash slats he was at that moment streaking with vermilion paint. Mrs. Chester A. Framm. modishly attired in a tight-fitting suit of blue. stood on the sidewalk in affable conversation with a jet-spangled old lady who, as she talked. wagged in her right hand a huge bird cage containing an enormous red-and-green parrot. Half a block away Chester recognized Flossie's new acquisitions—Aunt Het and her familiar fiend Oscar.

"Lord sake! Lord sake!" shrieked the winged devil, holding himself upside down by his unbreakable beak.

"Why, Aunt Het!" exclaimed Chester as he reached forward and did his duty by the smiling cheek she presented for his kiss.

"Goob, dear," urged Flossie, almost before the salutation had been repeated on her own smooth lips, "won't you please take Oscar over and hold him up next to the paint?"

"Next to the paint?" asked Chester blankly as he took the bird cage in his helpless hand.

"We're trying to match him," explained his

wife. "And please don't argue—Mr. Horn's charging us by the hour."

Framm took the shrieking Oscar over and held him next to the paint, per instructions.

"Mr. Horn," tactfully suggested Aunt Het to the house painter, "don't you think we'd better try a little blue in the red—Oscar's wings aren't at all the shade you're using."

"Color-blind, old sweetheart!" pronounced Floss. "Don't you pay any attention to Aunt Het, Mr. Horn."

Mr. Horn, who showed a scabby face under a derby hat which he had punched full of holes, apparently for ventilation, stood patiently aside and compared Oscar's wings with the vermilion on the window slats.

"A little yella would fix it, I guess," he voted.
"There!" crowed Floss triumphantly. "That's
what comes of being an artist. Oscar's scarlet,
isn't he, Mr. Horn? And his tail isn't sage
green like that stripe under the sign. It's apple
green, isn't it, Mr. Horn? There now, Aunt
Het. See what you almost did! And you've
lived with Oscar all these years and never saw
him in his true colors!"

"He's got to be an absolute match," pronounced Aunt Het decisively. "Aunt Het's offered to loan us Oscar for a window display," Floss volunteered after a minute inspection of the paint pots.

"Only for two hours in the afternoon," the old lady qualified.

"Only two hours in the afternoon. We'll have a dummy parrot sawed out of a board and painted to match," Floss rattled on. "Then Oscar will come in daily and ballyhoo for the Ink. Isn't it splendid!"

"Splendid!" echoed the president of the Framm Complexion Company Ink. He rubbed his hands in delight. Strange how the thing was getting into his blood.

"But of course," he qualified, "maybe people will ask what a red-and-green parrot has to do with Angel Bloom."

"Sush!" cried Floss. "You ought to see our window card—The Parrot lives a Hundred Years—Framm's Compounds Create Lasting Beauty."

"Let's go inside," suggested Aunt Het.

A crowd was beginning to gather, mostly Chinese idlers, messenger boys and truckmen—a class unconsidered in the creation of beauty shops.

The interior of Framm's was quite different

from the one Chester had first beheld from the door of a fog-bound hack. The floor was carpeted in pink and the wall was papered in the same shade. All the shelves, cabinets and show cases were ivory enameled. The Framm compounds had, in the few months past, been complicated into Angel Bloom Salve, Angel Bloom Lotion, Angel Bloom Elixir, Framm's Magic Hair Gloss and the Yard of Beauty Shelf, the last including all the Framm preparations with a celluloid manicure set thrown in. Which was in the nature of a miracle; but nothing more miraculous than this unheralded and smiling appearance of Aunt Het upon the scene.

"Well," smiled that mysterious being, seating herself upon one of the whirling stools in front of the show case, "Flossie tells me you're turning out to be quite a business man."

"He's wonderful!" chimed in Floss. "I always told you he would be."

"Thanks," responded Chester, flattered in spite of his better nature. Then with a stroke of boldness he had undoubtedly borrowed from his wife he asked: "When did you get over being cross with us, Aunt Het?"

"I? Cross? When was I ever cross with you two foolish darlings?"

"Something told me, the day we moved—"
Floss, who stood behind him, pinched his ear
quite painfully. "Floss simply insisted on
moving," went on the old lady. "My spirit
guide warned me against the insurance business and Mr. Applethwaite had promised to
dismiss you."

"Oh." Chester heard in so many words what he had suspected this long time. The discharge and the eviction—and possibly the spirit guide—coming all in the same hour, had been one of those Floss-arranged melodramas.

"And just look what it's done for you!" cried Aunt Het. "Now you're boss of your own business and making money hand over fist."

"Well, yes."

Chester was a shade less enthusiastic than he had been a minute ago.

"Aren't vou?"

"I've been going over the trade in Los Angeles," said he. "Flossie's advertisements never fail to draw a crowd, but all the big druggists have their own preparations. The Mr. Framm Loves a Pretty Girl poster created considerable amusement. I got some ordersseven cases all told. But as far as I can make out we're retailers trying to break into the wholesale. The shop about pays for itself, but we still owe for part of the fixtures. Floss got us started with a loan on her street-railway stocks, but that's about gone for raw materials—"

"Two hundred dollars in my own selfish stocking," Floss corrected him.

"We have a limited credit for supplies which we've got through Holbetter; but Holbetter's the smallest druggist in America, I suppose. There's the matter of bottles alone. We're using eleven different types and sizes which we have to buy in small lots—the most expensive way. That's where we stand. We're looked upon as a set of patent-medicine fakers and a sudden expansion would blow us off the map."

"Doesn't he sum it up won-derfully!" cooed lovely Floss, clapping her hands. "And to think when I found him he was nothing but an orator. And now he talks like the president of the First National Bank."

"There's some difference between us and the First National Bank," he informed her with a sad smile. "We're a lot more fun!" chirped Flossie. "Oh, see how I stenciled rosebuds on all the doors. Aunt Het, are you going to lend us Oscar to-day?"

"The paint might make him ill," objected the old lady, rising with her sacrilegious cage. "I'll have Wong bring him round with his perch to-morrow afternoon."

"Hor-rors! Hor-raws! Awk! Awk!" screamed Oscar as Aunt Het, defying her luck, passed out under Mr. Horn's polychrome ladder.

"Why didn't you tell me it was you that got Aunt Het and Mr. Applethwaite to throw me out?" he accused her as soon as Flossie's eccentric relative had taken her departure.

"Old Nuisance," she replied, "you ought to know why. It's impossible for me to think and talk at the same time. And you've scarcely kissed me once since you got back."

Dr. Nathaniel Hawthorne Holbetter walked in upon the love scene. He was a quaint little person, and when costumed for the street he wore an obsolete derby with a high square crown over his abundant iron-gray locks. His veiny right hand clasped an ebony cane with an ivory handle carved to resemble a female leg bent at the knee. He affected greenish broadcloth and a huge Masonic watch cham.

"You back, Framm?" he asked sharply, making it plain that it was Mrs. Framm who had drawn him there. His question trailed off into a series of loud clicks.

"Just this minute," replied Chester. "How are things going?"

"Rotten!" He clicked once. "Quite rotten!" He clicked twice.

"That's what I like about Buffalo Willie!" exclaimed Floss, coming over and stroking his dangerous chin beard. "He sees the bright side of ev-erything. Isn't he cute, Goober?"

Buffalo Willie's old face puckered itself into a series of fond little wrinkles. It was plain to see that the witchery of Floss had changed him into a small hairy pet.

"Yes. Yes. Yes-yes." Buffalo Willie emitted a long series of clicks. "But we've got to come down to tacks. Tacks!"

He seated himself on a stool and as he talked he pulled fragments of dried root out of his pocket and chewed savagely.

"Tacks. Things have to go forward or back in this world. No standstill. That's the trouble with the Pharmacy. Standstill. Feet

the mud and you start to back up. Under1d?"

What's that drug you're always eating, llie?" asked Floss, her mind as usual on the crete rather than the abstract.

Licorice. Good for the throat. Have 1e?" He passed a fragment over to her I she chewed gingerly.

Now these preparations. Overstocked, unsold. Expensive loft rented to manuface. Six girls employed compounding the loss and creams." Click-click. "Too many. id two off yesterday."

I had a notion we were undercapitalized," ected Chester.

Wrong. Overstocked. These new preparms all very well. But they're scarcely on market. What we've got to do is to sell re Angel Bloom right away or——" Clickk. That seemed to settle it for Angel om.

'How much have we on hand?"

'Angel Bloom? Twenty-six hundred bot-Seemed to put too much faith in the paration. How many orders did you get in Angeles?" "For Angel Bloom? Two cases," Chester was bound to admit.

"That's it. Something about the advertising. Shouldn't wonder if the Magic Hair Gloss might go pretty well." The hair gloss was Holbetter's own invention. "But no capital for that. Everything devoted to Angel Bloom Cream. Not selling right. Framm Complexion ad all right. That sort of stuff has to percolate."

"Of course we can't pay our debts with stock on hand," agreed the president of the Ink.

"Can't be done. Now the fourteenth. Need at least eight hundred dollars before the first. Otherwise——" Click-click.

"In a word we're required to get rid of twenty-six hundred bottles of Angel Bloom Cream in two weeks if we expect to pull through," was Chester's excellent summing of the case.

"And miracles don't happen. Not in the drug business."

"You poor sweetheart!" It was Floss who came into the conference. "How like a child you do talk!"

"Mean to say?" snapped the little old gen-

"Twenty-six hundred bottles of pink tleman. lotion. Couldn't force it on 'em in two weeks. Not without a pump!"

"We'll get the pump, Willie."

"Maybe we can. Maybe so. Maybe so." "I'm just the least bit bruised," she insisted, "to think of the way you've gone back on all the nice things you said about my window card with pretty me in the center."

"Some people like it," Buffalo Willie admitted, "but it sells no goods. Only vesterday dark fellow comes along. Stops in front of the pharmacy. Dangerous looking. Danger-Takes off hat, rubs head!" Willie clicked twice. "Then comes rushing into store. Where did you get that picture?' Dangerous. Thought he was going to throw fit, so stood ready with aromatic spirits. 'Friend of mine,' says I. 'Unknown lady inventor. Try a bottle?' Will not,' says he; 'but I'll give a dollar for the poster.' Last one I had. Refused. How's that?"

Chester looked at Floss, who at the moment was looking at Buffalo Willie.

"Wasn't he sweet!" she exclaimed.

"Perhaps. Women have peculiar notions. Hated this fellow. Spaniard. When I refused to sell he almost stole the Love a Peach poster right out of the window. Bad lot. Finally said 'My card!' and went boiling into the street. Get some queer compounds in my business."

"He gave you his card?" asked Floss in the gentlest possible tone.

Buffalo Willie went rummaging through his peculiar clothes and fished out a peculiar assortment of papers mixed with shreds of licorice root. At last he blew the dust from a small card before presenting it to Mrs. Framm. Her face was a study.

"I knew he would!" she murmured eventually, and passed the card to her husband, who made no comment as he read:

Mr. Ramon de Silva

Representing the San Francisco Blade

As soon as Chester had escorted Doctor Holbetter to the sidewalk and been slyly informed that Mrs. Framm was a wonderful woman—watch her—accomplish anything—blow something up some time—Chester returned to the interior of the Angel Bloom Shop and asked of his amazing consort:

"What are you going to do about this Spig-goty?"

"Do about him? Why, use him, of course!"

"Now look here, Floss! We can't have our business wrecked any more than it is by having that nuisance round. What's he doing in San Francisco?"

"I haven't asked him," she replied calmly. "But I suppose he's come up here to find me." "Oh."

"Isn't it providential? Just at the time we need him."

"What can we do with him?"

"Use him in the Iuk, foolish."

"In what capacity, if you don't mind saying?"

"Press agent."

"Press agent! He looks about as much like a press agent as I look like a hairdresser."

"How you get my ideas! Now do be a dear old love-box and call up the Blade office and ask Spig to have dinner with us at Marchand's. Hurry, Goob, dear. We've got to sell oceans of Angel Bloom in a week, and we can't leave a single cobblestone unturned in San Francisco."

CHAPTER IX

SUSIE THE BULL

AT EIGHT-THIRTY that evening the cozy group of three were finishing an early dimer at Marchand's. By the size of the check, which Chester was paying, it was easy to infer that Floss had many important things on her program of high-pressure salesmanship.

"So the whole circus—tent's canvasmen, menagerie and wagons—is stranded out on the sand lots. The property owners won't let them exhibit, the mortgagees have seized half their rolling stock, and you can hear the manager swearing in circus language the whole length of Mission Street."

Thus The Spiggoty, apparently delighted with his unexpected meeting, finished a long story of the broken-down show which he had reported briefly in this evening's edition of the Blade. A changed and reduced Spiggoty he was from the haughty Hildago of Dyak. His blue suit was a trifle shiny, his manner

deferential to the successful rival; but there was the same look of doglike devotion in the somber eyes which he turned toward the girl.

"That's the very circus we want!" cried she, dropping her hand bag and permitting The Spiggoty to stoop for it. "Are you all quite finished? We've got time to get out there before they put the boa constrictor in his umbrella case or whatever they do with the poor old dear at night."

In his newly accepted situation of press agent for the Ink, Ramon de Silva had hinted at possibilities. Chester dropped his napkin and followed Flossie's mad charge out into the street. His not to question why. Floss had decided and the Company Ink had but to foot the bills. In the car bumping out toward circus town he remained the silent partner, viewing with alarm his wife's evident delight in her renewed acquaintance with The Spiggoty. Press agent! How long was this surprising arrangement expected to last?

At the end of the line an acrid smell and weird trumpeting through the dusk proclaimed the circus. It turned out to be a shabby affair with one tent still standing and innumer-

able gypsy forms grubbing about camp fires or swearing at work horses.

"Could I see the manager or floor walker or somebody in authority?" asked Floss of a seamy individual who sat on a pile of colored stakes and smoked an awful cigar.

"Ask for Hank," prompted The Spiggoty.
"If you would just speak to Mr. Hank," smiled little Mrs. Framm.

The apparition muttered something sounding like "Ug" and strode away.

"Hank!" The name seemed to have affected the dainty inventor of perfumed lotions as she stood hedged about by woeful menagerie smells. "I suppose Hank is an abbreviation for Handkerchief, ain't it?"

"That's the man," said Spig, pointing through the dusk and indicating a roly-poly figure as it emerged from a tent flap.

He came up looking mean and hard with his dyed mustache and pink shirt front.

"What's wanted?" he growled, giving them the evil eye.

"Oh, this is Mr. Hank? I came out to see if you would rent me one of the animals or a cally-ope maybe."

"Huh. I'm glad there's somebody in this

hick town that wants to pay for something. I've been under the main top for thirty years and I never trouped out against such a bunch of stiffs."

"I thought you'd like San Francisco," she agreed. "Almost everybody does—at once. Now have you got a royal Bengal tiger or a marmoset to hire by the day?"

"Are you kiddin' me, girlie?" asked Mr. Hank; but he looked less fierce, as people were inclined to do when their eyes were set on Floss.

"Not the least little particle. What have you got roaring there under that darling tent?"

It was indeed roaring, even at that moment.

"Three bulls and some cats," volunteered the proprietor.

"Oh. Then that's the dairy department!"

"Elephants and lions," prompted The Spiggoty. "That's what they call 'em in the show business."

"It must be dee-lightful!" she cried. "Living out picnic style and calling everything by irregular names. If I called them just elephants would you understand me?"

"I might," Mr. Hank permitted.

"Well, maybe that's what I want."

"What would you be doing with an elephant?" His suspicious manner seemed to be returning.

"You see we're running a beauty parlor."

"Ho! Ho!" Mr. Hank's roars rivaled the trumpeting of his captive bulls. "What in hell—excuse me, lady—do you want with an elephant in a beauty parlor?"

"I wouldn't just put him in it, you know. And I'd promise to bring him back at suppertime all dusted off—or whatever you do with elephants after dark."

"H-m. Well, come here and look," said the manager.

Under the flapping tent, shabbily lit by lanterns, three swaying mountains of flesh could be seen indistinctly. It was a nightmare passage down the narrow aisle, shoulders fairly brushing dark cages in whose slatted depths eyes like balls of fire glared out while the padpadding of feline feet could be heard somewhere too close for safety.

Right behind Chester's broad back an appalling roar belched through the gloomy cavern and almost knocked him off his legs. He

leaped several feet. Floss, strange woman that she was, walked serenely on.

"It's just the lion," sang out the manager. "He won't hurt you."

"You heard what he said," cooed Floss ever so reassuringly. She groped out in the shadows and gave Chester her hand. It was icy cold. He would have been more deeply touched by this, no doubt, had he not noted in the semidarkness that she had passed her other hand to The Spiggoty.

"This way, lady," suggested Mr. Hank, and upon the word he disappeared between the two high gray walls which upon closer inspection proved to be the sides of full-grown elephants.

"Riley!"

"Hi-oo!" The jungle call responded distantly from out the den of beasts.

"Fetch another lantern."

A light was seen weaving under elephantine legs, and Chester, now taking the lead, followed between the living walls, Flossie and her press agent walking gingerly in the rear. Riley, a stubbled tramp in a plaid cap, held the lantern high over his head, giving the visitors from another world a full view of Mr. Hank's monsters. Three broad sunken fore-

heads lowered over them, three sets of stumpy yellowish tusks seemed pointing straight at their unprotected breasts while three pairs of bilious wicked eyes rolled terribly in the sudden glare. Chester, who had heard of elephants crowding forward and crushing their victims with their foreheads, noticed the great log chains which held their rear legs to stakes. This reassured him. He hoped that Flossie wouldn't be scared. She was as pale as death, but her eyes were dancing.

"They come rather large, don't they?" she criticized.

"Them two," said the manager, indicating two foreheads looming over them, "are nine-foot bulls—Cæsar and Brutus. But this one here"—he took the lantern from Riley and led the way a few paces along the canvas—"she's a runt."

"What a pity she never grew up," sympathized little Mrs. Framm. "She isn't over seven feet tall."

"Seven-foot-five at the shoulders," the naturalist corrected. "She had a shock when she was a baby. Her name's Susie and she's smart as a whip for all that."

"Poor thing!" said Floss. "I suppose you'd

rent her cheap on account of her withered condition?"

"Whaddaya call cheap?" asked the manager.

"How do they come—by the pound? You affectionate darling!"

Floss addressed this last compliment to Susie, who had slyly reached out her snakelike nose and was smelling the decorations on the lady's hat. Mr. Hank upraised the short stick he was carrying and using it like a baseball bat smote Susie resoundingly across the trunk. Slowly, deliberately she rolled up her inquisitive end.

"She's a nervous wreck, isn't she!" cried Floss. "I'd want her for one day, maybe two—with her nurse, of course."

"What for?" insisted Mr. Hank, who, as he had just proved, was a man of decision.

"Take me out into the air!"

Not only was she pallid now but her eyes had ceased to dance.

Without a moment's hesitation Chester, evading The Spiggoty's proffered attention, lifted her in his arms and half carried her through the unknown horrors until again they breathed the sweet winds under the stars.

"Get her a drink!" commanded the indignant husband.

"Sure," Mr. Hank obliged with a halffilled flask which he drew from his hip pocket. Chester had meant a drink of water, but Floss wet her lips from the bottle and smiled again.

The four of them sat down upon a pile of crates within reflecting distance of the bivouac fire round which a dozen rough characters grumbled together and drank something out of a tin bucket.

"Now this is what Buffalo Willie calls tacks," Floss went into the subject with renewed vigor. "I've positively decided to have an elephant. Or have you any kangaroos in stock?"

"Four," admitted Mr. Hank.

"Kangaroos are so restless," she soliloquized. "It needs a boomerang to make them behave. I don't suppose you keep boomerangs, Mr. Hank?"

Mr. Hank admitted that they were just out of boomerangs, but urged: "Susie's got brains. What do you want with her in the complexion business? When it comes to complexions I'd say there was some that's got it on her—you, for instance. What's the idea?"

"It's lovely the way you appreciate things!" she cried, offering Mr. Hank one of her best smiles, which immediately turned his naturally repulsive features into a symphony of delight. Then she turned a rapidly signaling glance to her companions. "You don't know the least thing about natural history, Goob," she hinted. "But Spig's my press agent."

Having learned diplomacy with life's rapid advance Chester left them alone on the pile of colored poles and went to the other side of the bivouac fire, where men in a strange argot were discussing Full House Marie and the passion for a copper-roofed kinker which had caused her desertion from the main top. A half hour of this veiled scandal satisfied Chester A. Framm, who sought out the brighthued lumber pile to face his wife and The Spiggoty in conference with Mr. Hank.

"Waterproof?" Mr. Hank was anxiously inquiring.

"No. That's the weak point. If it should rain we'd have to change to a Bengal tiger or something permanent. But I think the weather's settled. Won't you be friends with us, Mr. Hank?"

There fell a space of contemplation during

which the manager chewed a shapeless cigar under his villainous mustachios. What he could do with a little ready money was undoubtedly uppermost in his mind.

"Keeper would have to go along," he mumbled at last. "That would come to some extra expense."

"Oh, the keeper of course!" she agreed with all her native enthusiasm. "And haven't you got an awfully funny one?"

"There's Riley," he conceded. "He used to be a clown—an August with an act on the slack wire.

"He cracked one of his vertebrals and he's been bull boss ever since. He's got a whiteface English-dude make-up that's a scream."

"Per-fect!" she cooed. "Chester, think of it! Isn't he a sweetheart?"

Even in an excess of enthusiasm Chester could not characterize Mr. Hank as a sweetheart.

"And of course you'll throw in Riley," she coaxed almost lovingly.

"I will not!" This was certain. "He'll be twenty-five extra."

"How horrid of you! And how much will Susie the bull come to?"

"A hundred dollars a day will be about right." He said it savagely, hinting an attack by canvasmen unless his terms were agreeable.

"That will be satisfactory," she said with unusual hauteur.

"Flossie!" gasped her husband, little knowing where the hundred and twenty-five dollars would come from for this folly.

"When does Susie usually get up in the morning?" she was asking smoothly of the manager.

"We won't quarrel about that," he grumbled.

"Well, then, Doctor Holbetter, my chemist, will be round at eight with Mr. de Silva, my publicity manager. And I'll be here at nine, say, if Susie closn't mind."

"I've been follerin' the red wagon a long time," boasted Mr. Hank when they shook hands on the transaction, "but this is a new act on me."

"It's hardly anything to what I can think up when I really try," she modestly informed him, and led her retinue toward the trolley.

"Let's get off at a drug store," said Floss almost as soon as they had got on.

"Preparations for Susie?" asked Chester now too feeble for argument.

"Sort of. I want to telephone Buffalo Willie—the poor dear will be up all night, I suppose. And then we must get Mr. Horn to do the sign."

CHAPTER X

WHAT ANGEL BLOOM CREAM COULD DO

SAN FRANCISCO was always cosmopolitan, but it was never sufficiently so to remain indifferent to what it saw that balmy morning in mid-September when, at the hour of eleven, a new and startling version of the Floss Idea conducted its solemn comic march up through the Mission and into the very trade centers of the town.

"It's pink!"

The first small boy who was aware of Susie far out in the suburbs started the watchword, which was cried all over town ere the fatal hour of noon.

"It's pink!"

Innocent bystanders rubbed their innocent eyes and passed the remark on to astonished neighbors who repeated it, the phrase running from lip to lip, none so disputatious as to deny that obvious and colorful truth.

Pink was Susie, even unto the uttermost

rends of her anatomy. Buffalo Willie had mixed the compound which so smoothly corered her vast bulk, but it was Flossie who had added the coloring matter, a brilliant shade of rose blushing through a field of snowy white Susie's trunk resembled nothing so much as a vard and three-quarters of pink rubber hose. Floss had added to the effect by touching the old darling's cheek bones with bright spots of red and, by way of contrast, whitening the sunken forehead. There was something almost indecent about so many square feet of pinkness marching undraped before the public stare. But it was necessary for the appartion, led by its capering clown-dude, to swing within reading distance before the full significance was comprehended.

Susie wore but a single garment, a snowwhite blanket thing, lettered with large blotches of black:

ANGEL BLOOM CREAM
DID THIS FOR MY COMPLEXION.
IT WILL DO THE SAME FOR YOURS.

The pink elephant and her attendant clown, equally lacking in a sense of humor, continued

their stately march through town. The crowd thickened. Shopmen left their shops unattended, butchers' boys dropped their baskets and ran after the prodigy, street cars halted as though stricken with the sight. Once or twice representatives of San Francisco's more or less modern police force were seen to charge the multitude in order to make make way for the royal progress.

"We'll all be arrested within the next block," muttered Chester to his Floss as they were following anxiously in the outskirts of the crowd.

"Nope," responded little Mrs. Framm decisively. "Spig got the mayor's license to march, parade and exhibit from eleven till four."

For the first time he noted the fluttering paper within her hand, which, by the way, trembled somewhat.

"And then he deserted us, I suppose," growled the much-enduring Chester.

"Spig? No—he'll never desert us. He's off somewhere stirring up the newspapers."

The pink elephant had now stopped in the midst of a circumambient crush. The great rosy mountain, rising above the throng, gave

the effect of some gigantic piece of confectionery surrounded by hungry ants. Never in the world's history had anything animate been so pink and huge. Susie had got jammed in and the police were clearing the way.

The Framms, wedged in behind two elderly, respectable colored persons, gained fragments of useful criticism.

"Hit's contrariwise to de law of Gawd," the black man, whose appearance was clerical, was explaining to his wife. "De Good Book say dat de beasts ob de woods an' de fowls ob de air shall not suffah beautifaction from de hand ob man——"

"Laws, honey!" giggled his consort, "ef I cud find a cold cream make me pale rossberry cullud laik dat elephum—yes, ma'am!"

Chester looked nervously round. It was just as he feared. Floss had another idea.

"Goob," she shrilled in his ear, "run over to the store and bring a dozen bottles of Bloom." Aunt Het was tending the place that morning.

"What for?" he parleyed.

"Oh, please!" she urged; and he could see by her expression that she was going to cry If he didn't. "Bring 'em round to the corner of Kearney and Market. I'll stop the parade there and—"

"What for?" he persisted in his utterly unreasonable way.

"Can't you see?" she hissed.

He who would have been on the way to a lignified public career by now had he married Carlotta Beam turned grumblingly and obeyed. Strange, he reflected, how people obeyed Flossie—men especially. Something akin to disgust filled him and urged him to disloyalty as he shuffled along toward the frivolous little shop on Eddy street. A dreadful fear possesed him. Was Floss conspiring that he, the prize-winning orator of Dyak University, should stand at a street corner shouting the virtues of a cosmetic swindle to the gaping town?

Then the picture of the fragile being whom he loved more than fame or reputation batling alone in the mob with her atrocious idea got possession of him. He couldn't help it now, Floss must have her way. He fairly an toward the green-and-red front on Eddy street, and once there, quite disdaining the istonished cries of Aunt Het and her parrot, he snatched a dozen bottles from the shelves, poked them recklessly into pockets and under elbows, and galloped back toward Floss's latest scene of disturbance. The nearer he got to Kearney and Market Streets the more clearly he saw that Floss was about to commit one of the brilliant desperate errors of genius. The prospect so appalled him that once or twice he was near to dashing the bottles to the curb, an act of mutiny.

But the charm of his little commander bore him swiftly, steadily on. Aunt Het in one of her moments of candor had said that Floss was playing a system. The key to that system was simply this: When in doubt attack the most unpromising field. She had married him out of Dyak upon this principle; she had got him a job in the office of her rejected lover; she had arranged his eviction from Aunt Het's apartment; she had hired an elephant and painted it in the colors of beauty—all a part of her system. But Chester had come to his limit of endurance.

By the condition of Market and Kearney Streets it was plain to see that the peach-colored Susie had stopped according to schedule. Boys were climbing telephone poles, people were scrambling to the roofs of trolley cars. The noise surged to a shout, then resurged into laughter. Chester, laden with those damnable bottles, fought his way forward, but the going was ever more difficult with each shoulder thrust. The crowd grew suddenly still with the silence of marvel. Gazing nervously toward the pink elephant Chester realized the cause of this frozen attention. Susie was being put through her tricks.

Slowly, ponderously, like a giant done in charlotte russe the pink elephant got up on her hind legs and raised her roseate trunk toward the midday sun.

"Salute the ladies and gentlemen!" shouted the white-faced comedian with the dudish dress suit and the exaggerated monocle.

Susie spread her forelegs above her pink belly and uttered a trumpet call which sounded from Telegraph Hill to the Cliff House.

Chester, who had managed to squeeze himself to the front ranks, was relieved by one thing. Floss was nowhere to be seen.

"By gosh, it is pink!" some brilliant naturalist discovered quite out loud.

"Pink—pink—pink!" The very heavens seemed to echo the cry.

Where and how was this all going to end? Chester A. Framm, who should have been inured to marvels by this time, found out some enough. The picture was forever to last in his memory—all San Francisco circling round a small open space; the pink elephant standing full length, like some nightmare caryatid; a small Semitic citizen somewhere in the background struggling with a pushcart load of assorted fruits and vegetables.

"Ay-hoo!" bellowed the clown dude, and blushing Susie began to get down. She came down in sections, as performing elephants prefer to do. First she gave way cautiously at the knees, then she descended to a Gargantuan squat, then she curled her pink trunk and brought her forefeet with a thud to the asphalt. The last phase of the maneuver consisted in raising her hind quarters and standing in the normal elephantine position, swaying from side to side.

San Francisco began to shout—a shout which was interrupted by Susie, who did, under the circumstances, the unkindest thing within her power. She uttered one heart-breaking shriek, swayed seasickly to one side and fell all of a heap. Great was the fall

reof. In the impact of that avalanche the it-bearing pushcart was struck, and a colul geyser of oranges, bananas, pineapples I lemons went spouting to the zenith. A lid little huckster crawled out from under nething and his crazy gesticulations were in the crowd.

'I knew it!" cried Chester A. Framm, dropg a half dozen bottles to wring his agonized ids. "That damned paint has killed her." Numerous San Franciscans surging forrd hemmed him in, but not too closely for eyesight to confirm his worst fears. Susie s lying flat on her side, like some curiously red leviathan, stranded and lifeless. The wn dude had knelt down and, it appeared, s gazing anxiously into her open mouth. 'Dead"

Thester heard some disinterested sympazer pronounce this like the tolling of a cked bell.

nside the circle a policeman had appeared l was pushing back the throng with the ken ritual which policemen have employed ler such circumstances since the days of araoh:

'Stand back there! Give 'em air!"

They stood back and gave 'em air so promptly that Chester found himself deserted by the ebbing humanity, almost alone in the front ranks. The clown dude had settled himself despondently upon Susie's shoulder and was regarding her outstretched trunk with a moody gaze. What should Chester do? As the temporary employer of the wrecked pink elephant what was his status before the public?

The question was decided for him in a jiffy, for an imposing female figure had swept forward out of the throng and stood accusingly before the clown dude.

"Who is the owner of this animal?" she was asking in a deep-throated distinct tone which held a familiar ring for Chester's ears.

"None of your business, lady," was Riley's diplomatic answer, which threw the crowd into transports of joy.

"That's exactly what it happens to be," she pointed out in her cultivated voice. "I am a representative of the Humane Society."

Riley got down from Susie's shoulder.

"Ain't nobody been crool to no animal, lady," he protested, his chalk-white clown's face doubly tragic in its earnestness.

"It's plain to see that you have killed the elephant," she lectured, "by stopping its pores with a coat of house paint."

"Before Gawd, lady-"

"Are you responsible for this animal?"

"No'm. I'm only the stiff that---"

"Who is responsible for him?"

"That guy over there."

The clown dude pointed straight at the spot where Chester was standing exposed to view. The tall lady turned and gave him the full benefit of her scornful eyes.

Chester withered. It was Carlotta Beam! "I'm responsible for him—her," he boldly informed this new complication, for it was evident that there was no escape now.

"Ches——" she started to say, then bit her classic underlip. She was really very beautiful as she stood there; an untidy, Slavic sort of beauty. A strand of her raven-black hair had come undone and her dark eyes burned with astonishment, rebuke, indignation.

"I didn't know, Mr. Framm," she began coldly, "that you were engaged in the circus business."

Facing the woman who in a desperate meeting had informed him that his feet were straying in the primrose paths he was loath to tell her in so many words that he was not a circus man but the proprietor of a patent skin lotion, two samples of which were now protruding from his pockets.

"It was entirely an accident, Miss Beam," he replied as levelly as he could. "We merely hired this elephant by the day. She is not painted with house paint; she is colored by a perfectly harmless substance. Oh, search me!" He was losing patience with himself and Carlotta and the gaping multitude.

"Lady," cut in the policeman, standing officiously between, "if you're going to prefer charges, you'd better do it now."

Carlotta stood a little moment, her deep tragic gaze fixed upon the man who had fallen so low.

"I—don't want to make any charges," she said generously. "If I've made any—I—I withdraw them."

Chester was about to stammer his thanks.

"No you don't!"

It was undoubtedly Flossie's voice, but how it got there and what had lent it that fighting note was beyond Chester's dizzy comprehension. Yet there stood Floss beside the police-

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man, the gold of her eyes spitting fire, her fashionable little figure drawn taut as she faced her old rival of Dyak days.

"Oh, Mrs. Framm!"

Carlotta looked positively foolish. Flossie had taken the wind out of her sail as she had done so many times of yore.

"I heard you say before all these people that you represented the Humane Thingumajig," declared Mrs. Framm in a voice which penetrated to the outermost edges of the throng.

"Humane Society," responded Miss Beam, straightening against the blow.

"Well, then—we've hired an elephant for advertising purposes. You've seen it drop dead because of our terrible horrid contemptible mean treatment. And you want to arrest us."

"I was just saying to Ches—to Mr. Framm—that I wish to withdraw the charge."

"What do you want to withdraw the charge for?" Flossie shot the question as straight as an arrow. "Are you afraid to appear in court against us? Afraid that you can't prove you're a member of the Society for the Prevention of Things?"

"Hush!" whispered Chester.

"I won't hush!" replied Flossie. "Carlotta Beam, what are you afraid of?"

"I am not aware—" she began.

"O Lord!" groaned the little persecutor. "Here's somebody else who's not aware."

But Carlotta wasn't to be interrupted in her rhetorical flow.

"I am not aware that I expressed fear, Mrs. Framm. And if it is your wish that this obvious case of cruelty shall be prosecuted in the public courts, then I reverse my intentions. It is plain to be seen that this unfortunate beast has been smeared with a preparation that has done him bodily harm."

"About six bottles of that preparation wouldn't do you bodily harm," mocked Flossie. Which was unworthy even of her.

"Officer," spoke Carlotta in measured tones, "I demand that these people be arrested."

The officer, who proved to be a seraph named Doody, turned a broad face, first to Carlotta, then to Floss. Already it was easy to see whom he preferred.

"What the devil did you do that for?" groaned Chester of the flushed and lovely little criminal at his side.

"Shut up!" was all she said.

And these were the bitterest words that had thus far passed between them.

"It's a shame, lady." The look which Officer Doody gave Mrs. Framm was more sympathetic than the law required. "If it wasn't in the line of earnin' me daily bread——" And he gave her a melting eye.

"That's the only thing that saves you," trilled Floss, returning an eye for an eye.

Two policemen escorted them to the patrol box and stood guard over the new-found treasures. Several other policemen passed through the throng collecting evidence. As the Black Maria came clanging round a corner, slowed down and backed up to accommodate the Framms, something like a dense pink cloud was seen by Chester to rise upward and upward above the populace. It was a pink cloud that swayed from side to side; a pink cloud from which yards of pink rubber tubing writhed back and forth, soliciting for peanuts.

Susie had come to.

CHAPTER XI

THE PINK VERDICT

MAGISTRATE MICHAEL HENRY HARORAN, before whom the case was tried in the morning, had at about this point in his career so fixed himself in the heart of California that he was already being mentioned for promotion to the State Supreme Court and from there to higher honors. The Framms, having been released on Aunt Het's bail, sat in the midst of the Municipal Building's combined smells, which ranged from the morgue downstairs to the detention room at the right of the throne where Judge Haroran was meting out justice.

"Did you see the gang out in the street?" whispered Floss to the discouraged man beside her. "They're packed half across Portsmouth Square. People who can't get in have stuck round to get a look at Susie and—"

"Sh-h-h!" he cautioned her, because the great Haroran—who had a seamy face

adorned by two reddish eyebrows, which as he talked seemed to be pursuing each other like two blind mice across his forehead—was then advising one Ah Wok never again to employ a hatchet in the winning of his own true love. The Haroran method was rapid, for he had scarce consigned the yellow man to a month of laborious peace when he began to lecture a maimed longshoreman upon the ethics of handling loose paving stones.

"Isn't it marvelous! Everybody's waiting for us!" whispered Floss delightedly; which caused Chester to glare round the crowded room and decide that what she said was true.

The benches were crowded with spectators and the social standing of the audience was high—a small minority of listless hangers-on, opium addicts, women of the quarter; a large majority of well-dressed citizens and ladies of quality. A flood of sprightly newspaper comment had roused San Francisco's easily tempted gala spirit and was lending a fashionable air to the police court's squalor.

Every eye, so it seemed, was on the Framms, and even Judge Haroran, performing acrobatics with his mouselike eyebrows,

appeared to be awaiting the dramatic titbit of the day.

"Phew!" Floss exhaled feelingly. "It smells so in here that I don't blame the elephant for staying outside. Hello! There's Buffalo Willie with the clown dude and the heart specialist."

Holbetter and Susie's keeper were seen huddled against the door, closely associating with a peppery, square-built gentleman whose economical gray mustache indicated a conservative cast of thought.

"Doctor Hilcross!" muttered Chester, recognizing California's most fashionable physician.

"Yeah. He's a crosspatch. Took me ever so long to convince him. But I cried—and here he is."

Another familiar face could be seen coming down the aisle. It had a dimple in its chin and a deeper one in its rosy left cheek. Sparkling Irish eyes sought out Mrs. Framm as Officer Doody, the susceptible policeman who had made the arrest, stopped and leaned over in an attitude of fatherly solicitude.

"A fine crowd ye've drawn, Mrs. Framm. I've seen man-ny a society murther case has

drawn a wor-r-rse wan. An' reporters an' correspondents from every paper on the Coast! It's notoryus, ma'am, an' a credit to yer foine mind."

Reporters indeed! Out of the jumble came numerous brisk young men with wads of yellow paper and quick glances from the clerk of the court to the prize exhibit of the day. A man with a camera moved cautiously along the wall, apparently jockeying for a good position by the door. Chester reflected upon the unenviable prominence in which they now found themselves; he was reminded of poor Susie, whom he had seen a few minutes ago out on Kearney Street being pinched and poked by a morbid mob, eager to know whether the leaden complexion she now wore was natural or merely a coat of gray paint laid over her really pink skin.

He was grimly determined to see it through—what else could he do under the circumstances?—but the knowledge that they were at the end of their rope disheartened him even before the law could do its worst.

More Chinese feuds were settled out of hand. Bow Kin and Toy Few had quarreled over an opium pipe, with the result that Kin had sought to submerge Few under a bowl of hot rice.

"Think of the way they waste food!" was all the good Floss got out of it; though Messrs. Bow Kin and Toy Few were dedicated to thirty days in the workhouse.

Floss missed nothing.

"What's a workhouse like?" she cheerfully inquired, giving Chester a nudge.

He didn't know, and he didn't want to know.

Over in the front row he could see Carlotta's serious look of waiting. Through his unhappy mind there swam a vision of yesterday; of that same still, studious gaze with which she had regarded him as he delivered his prize-winning remarks on William of Orange. His mentor, his light of leading, his intellectual guide—and here she sat in a pestilential court room waiting to testify against him in the matter of an undignified petty offense. At least, thought Chester A. Framm. his wit should now be pitted against hers. He would have that bitter satisfaction. The dramatic possibilities intrigued his imagination. He and Carlotta would fight the case as one lawyer against another.

Officer Doody again interrupted with the whispered information that the Framms would be next on the docket. And had they witnesses?

"Oh, splen-did witnesses!" she smiled peachily up at her latest captive. "Doctor Hilcross the specialist, and Doctor Holbetter the chemist, and—"

The court clerk here interrupted with one of those unintelligible noises familiar to court-room announcements. It was a continuous droning bray terminating in words which sounded like "Chezera Framm and Florba Framm."

"I think he's calling us," intimated Floss, tugging at her husband.

Together they proceeded toward the awful seat of judgment. Carlotta had come forward, too, and Chester was relieved to see that Buffalo Willie, true to his trust, had assembled his fellow witnesses. The room lay in an obliging hush. Several newspaper men ably ushered by The Spiggoty had crowded as near as possible to the bench.

The Framms and the vengeful Carlotta were now standing right under the fiery topknot and acrobatic eyebrows of the most famous police judge on the Pacific Coast; and Chester's first impression was of those twin hanks of hair chasing themselves prankishly up, up on his forehead as he leaned forward. He smiled. It was plain to be seen that he had got sight of Floss and liked the view.

The clerk of the court unfolded a disagreeable document and mumbled over something to the effect that Chezera Framm and Florba Framm were charged with a misdemeanor to Wit. To Wit seemed to have vague things to do with smearing house paint on an animal to Wit. There was, altogether, more wit than humor in the clerk of the court's mumbled complaint.

"Officer Doody!"

His Honor uttered it in his great rolling voice, and the seraphic policeman came forward.

Officer Doody launched jauntily forth into his version of the adventure, working racily toward the climactic scene which terminated as follows:

"Then the elephant, Y'r Honor, layed right down on the job, Y'r Honor, wreckin' a poosh-cart an' snorin' like wan dead. At that the

la-ady rushes forward an' demands the arrist of bot' of 'em----"

"One minute, Officer Doody." The magistrate, who had continued to lavish his attentive glances upon Flossie's hat—she had trimmed it this morning with a long pheasant's feather—brought his eyebrows down from their perch atop and suggested: "Be more explicit, please. Which lady rushes forward and demands the arrest of both of what?"

"The Humane Soci'ty la-ady demands th' arrist of bot' the defendants, if it please Y'r Honor. The elephant, which was a female, was a-layin' there quite pink from head to tail."

"Pink and prostrate," soliloquized Magistrate Haroran, who was evidently a favorite with the press, for several reporters flew to their pencils while the court room tittered.

"Is the society's representative present to prefer charges?"

"Here, Your Honor."

Carlotta Beam, pale but determined, took her place in the midst of her enemies, and upon the invitation of the court grew explicit.

"The elephant was found in a state of complete collapse which, as it was plain to see, was superinduced by the thick coat of house paint that covered its body, thus interfering with the normal functions of the skin."

"What was the color of the paint, if you please?"

The celebrated eyebrows had raised themselves again and were now forming a merger with the superior shock of auburn hair.

It was evident that Judge Haroran did not admire Carlotta as a type.

"Pink," she replied distinctly.

The magic word started another ripple throughout the room; the ripple crescended to a roar.

"Order in the court!" bleated the bailiff, though he himself was covering his mouth.

"That is the same elephant now standing outside on Kearney Street?"

For a nervous moment it looked as though the magistrate would turn and wink at Flossie.

"Oh, Mister Judge," broke in Floss, "that's Susie. She's the pink elephant, only she's been washed off."

"H-m. Circumstantial evidence would go to prove, I should say, that the elephant sur-

vived the ordeal. However, might I ask, Miss---"

"Beam," Carlotta promptly supplied.

"——Miss Beam, in what way do you consider that the pink paint has been injurious to the animal's health?"

"The condition in which I found the elephant," Carlotta responded decisively, "would prove that."

"Mrs. Framm"—Judge Haroran's expression entirely changed; his eyebrows had come down to an amiable level, his little eyes snapped merrily—"how can you prove that your house paint didn't cause the—the downfall of Susie?"

"In the first place," replied Flossie, "she wasn't painted with house paint at all. In the second place Susie was a damaged elephant. She has a weak heart. She's had spells for years."

"I see. And how can you prove that she's nad spells for years?"

"Doctor Hilcross examined her last night," replied the ever-ready Floss.

"Ah, you mean Doctor Hilcross, the heart specialist?"

"Yes, sir," chirped Floss. "He's over by

the door keeping next to the ventilator. He's a crank about fresh air."

A stocky square man with a square gray mustache and square slit of a mouth was being led forward.

"Doctor Hilcross"—the Court's air was ever so respectful—"did you examine the elephant last night as the defendant says?"

"I did," testified the celebrated heart specialist in his choppy, chiding tone.

"And what did you find?"

"A nervous heart, valvular irregularity and a murmur. Apparently the trouble had extended over a course of years. Several of the circus people informed me that the elephant had been subject to spells of vertigo at frequent intervals. This is not uncommon among pachydermous animals born in captivity."

"Would you say that yesterday's spell of vertigo was helped along a trifle by the—decorations?"

"Positively not!"

"Thank you, doctor. That will be all."

The busy physician, stopping only to give Floss a curt nod, went his busy way. But already she was motioning to Buffalo Willie, who was edging forward, flourishing his ivory-topped cane.

"I've brought in a chemist," explained Floss, holding the little druggist affectionately by the arm, "to tell you about the pink stuff that covered up Susie. This is Doctor Holbetter—Nathaniel Hawthorne Holbetter."

"We're holding quite a reception," grinned the judge. "Doctor Holbetter, are you a qualified chemical expert?"

"Five years assistant city chemist, San José, Cal.," Nathaniel Hawthorne Holbetter explained in his shorthand method.

"That ought to qualify you. Have you examined the—beauty preparation which adorned the pink elephant?"

Judge Haroran was now having a perfect time.

"Mixed it myself."

"Ah. Then would you mind telling me how you compounded the prescription?"

"Delighted. One part talcum, one part flour, five parts water, eosin to add color. Sig.: Apply externally."

Sensation in the court. More bawls for order.

"Eosin," echoed the judge, whose eyebrows

were again performing cart wheels over his forehead, "sounds violent. Would such a chemical superinduce fits in an elephant?"

"Feed it to babies!" barked Buffalo Willie. "Often eat worse. Like it."

"Is this the formula for your beauty cream?"

"It is not," barked the little druggist. "Don't waste that on elephants."

"I see."

It was evident that Judge Haroran saw, for he was looking straight into the lovely eyes of Flossie Framm. Undoubtedly he was bewitched.

"Mrs. Framm," said he at last ever so gently as he leaned far down from his pulpit, "what is the name of the preparation your pink pet was advertising?"

Floss took a deep breath.

"Framm's Angel Bloom Cream!"

She sang it aloud in a clear sweet voice which tinkled into every corner of the gloomy court room.

"Wonderful!" said the eminent jurist. He lowered his jaw and his eyebrows in the same grimace; he had leaned far over, pressing the tips of his fingers together till the knuckes

cracked. "And tell me, Mrs. Framm, do you honestly think that this—er—Framm's Angel Bloom Cream contains any chemical that would do bodily harm?"

Flossie had sidled very close to the throne, and there in a series of poses that could not be misinterpreted she turned first one blooming cheek, then the other, to the full inspection of His Honor's ravished eyes.

"Would you say that it has done any harm to me?" she asked in a still, small voice.

"Case dismissed!" thundered Judge Haroran, racing his eyebrows wildly as he turned his stern gaze upon some mythical book, supposedly reclining on the desk to comfort and to calm the judicial mind.

Already the gentlemen of the press were abandoning their table and swarming toward the door in a competitive effort to head off the Framms.

That day and the next were exhausting ones in the Angel Bloom parlors, where a rush of barter and trade kept Chester and Aunt Het jumping from counter to counter all day, and where, upstairs, Flossie was at the end of her keen little wits supplying the

press with interviews sufficiently sensational to glut her sense of artistic values.

It was a dull season for murders, politics and divorce sensations; the evening papers had done the trial at length and in their best vein. The Spiggoty, who occasionally led off humorous news in the Blade with bursts of lyric rhyme, contributed the following:

There once was a girl in the social whirl With an elephant on her hands.

She stopped to think: "I will paint him pink And play to the big grand stands."

So she made a rush for a whitewash brush And a bucket of Angel Bloom—

But, as soon as she painted, the elephant fainted;

So this is our tale of gloom.

The morning papers specialized on photography. Susie was again brought out, decorated again in rose and white, and posed in an upright position with Floss sitting on her forehead. Floss dictated The Story of My Life for a Los Angeles Sunday edition; and a remarkable narrative it was, relating how Angel Bloom had been handed to her grand-

mother by a dying Egyptologist who had stolen it from a sacred casket of Ra.

Floss got the hard words out of The Spiggoty's old set of encyclopedias. Editors all up and down the Coast telegraphed queries to their correspondents. Free advertising raged, and the effect on the market was instantaneous.

Next evening when Floss had got into her kimono and was resting her tired feet on a chair Doctor Holbetter stalked into the scene with his usual burden of ill tidings.

"Even the Chinese drug stores want it!" he barked. "Telegraphic orders all up and down the Coast. Six cases to Boston Drug Store. Window displays Mr. Framm Knows a Pretty Girl all over town. Too bad. Chance to get rich. No capital."

"Willie," chirped Floss, "if you went to heaven you'd kick about the music."

"Know nothing about heaven. Farthest north I've been's Seattle. But do know this: Only two hundred bottles not sold. No capital to manufacture more. No credit. What? What?"

He went off into a long succession of clicks. "Aren't you a reputable citizen—aren't you

one of those things? Can't you borrow something on your drug store?"

"Don't make me laugh." He stood and chewed licorice, his little chin beard going busily.

"I've tried all the banks," said Chester, who had never been so tired in his life. "They don't regard us as a serious concern."

"And I hope they never will!" cut in Floss.

"But I should think you two great big brutal men would be able to raise a few thousand dollars without all that to-do."

"There's Applethwaite--"

"He's mad at me," Floss informed him. That apparently was another story.

"Exhausted our credit with wholesale drug concerns," Buffalo Willie chewed on. "Too bad. Can't fill orders." Click-click.

"Oh, well," yawned Floss, "I suppose I'll have to raise the money in the morning. And now please get out. I'm going to bed."

Next morning Chester, who had been mournfully seeking credit of an obscure savings bank in the Portsmouth Square region, was astonished by the sight of his Floss, dressed to kill—or at least to wound—enter-

ing a small Bohemian restaurant just round the corner from the Municipal Courts. Thus thrown into the position of a domestic spy he lingered at a corner and was further astonished to observe Judge Haroran step into the same restaurant by another door.

Unworthy jealousy raged in the heart of Chester A. Framm. Urged by the base instinct he waited a discreet few minutes, then followed in by the same door Floss had taken.

The place, which specialized in Mexican food, was divided into two small rooms. Chester took a table by the wall where, peering into the compartment beyond, he became an unseen witness to the latest comedy of Flossie's invention.

Judge Haroran was eating alone. At the table nearest him Floss was also eating alone. They were facing each other. The judge was reading a newspaper. Floss was reading another. Haroran ordered; Floss ordered. The judge, who was apparently in a forbidding mood, glowered into the paper, groping now and then for his food and pulling it round the edge. Floss lowered her paper now and then and peeped shyly over. Chester could not re-



strain a grin. Floss had met her match this time.

The grin was destined to linger only for the duration of one frugal course, for after the judge had emptied his plate, he lowered his paper and glanced toward the table opposite him. Their eyes met. Haroran bowed coldly and resumed his paper. Floss again took up her reading.

After all, thought Chester, Floss was doing this for the Company Ink. Just how he could not fathom—but his sympathy drifted toward his peculiar little wife. It was with a sort of triumphant thrill, then, that he saw Haroran at last rise gawkily, pay his score and saunter over to Floss' table.

The meeting was cordial apparently, for they shook hands; and the judge, after the manner of men captivated against their wills, seated himself on the edge of a chair. Floss was going on in her animated way, using her eyes to advantage, gesturing with all the force of her eloquent frivolity. The judge got farther into his chair, and before Chester's astonished eyes was revealed the picture of a man being gradually charmed, entranced, hypnotized. All this took about fifteen min-

utes, at the end of which time a waiter interrupted the interview with a bottle of ink and a large sheet of writing paper.

Chester had seen enough.

A half hour later he met Floss at a Kearney Street corner. She seemed not in the least surprised.

"The old cherubim and seraphim!" she smiled through the heightened color of her excitement. "Being one of those lawyer things he couldn't take my word for it. So I gave him our note for ninety days at seven per cent."

Chester whistled, having no more adequate expression at his command. She had passed over to him a long blue check which mentioned the sum of five thousand dollars and bore the signature of Michael Henry Haroran.

"Well, you went to a peculiar place for it," was his last weak protest.

"Mister Geese! That's just where gold miners go for their gold—to peculiar places."

Thereupon she kissed him affectionately, much to the diversion of upper Kearney Street.

CHAPTER XII

HOW SHE INTRODUCED HIM TO IMMORTAL FAME

THE lapse of fifteen years is bound to be dramatic. It can make a rich man out of a poor man, a beggar out of a chief; it can kill you dead, dead, dead and leave an absent-minded few to ask "What has become of Jones?" It can turn your life into a sour little tragedy or a sweet big romance. Or it can leave you at a standstill—which is not really a standstill because, as Buffalo Willie expressed it: "Feet in the mud and you've got to back up."

Fifteen years after the adventure with the pink elephant found Colonel and Mrs. Chester A. Framm—you notice the "Colonel," don't you?—occupying an expensive suite at the Hotel Merlinbilt, New York. "Col. and Mrs. Chester A. Framm, valet and maid, San Francisco, Cal."—thus it appeared on the register. He could write it now without a quiver of the pen—that military title which, like his

chronic hay fever, had grown upon him with the years. But Floss did not create hav fever -as she oft reminded him during sneezy spells; whereas she never denied that she brought Colonel into his life.

She had bestowed the title with one sweep of her helpless little hand. Had she chosen to make him an earl it would have been the same. But she had decided that Goober looked military, that a thingumbob would add dignity to his middle-aging personality. Therefore she had linked her own persuasive genius to The Spiggoty's, and between them Colonel had become a fact. A celebrated series of street-car advertisements, circulated through as many states as the flag has stars, had begun its appeal with "Colonel Framm says." Soon afterward a horde of small-town newspapers broke out into boiler-plate witticisms, supposedly repeated from the lips of Col. Chester A. Framm. No eagles were ever won with less trouble for the winner.

So when the curtain again rose, after the above-mentioned interval of time, the Framms had been a fortnight in New York, and, like your true San Franciscan, Chester was pining to go home. A busy two weeks it had been,

for the Company Ink had now dignified its name to Framm's Institute—just what it instituted was never made clear; and Flossie's perpetual energy had caused a chain of parrot-colored beauty shops to wind its perfumed way literally from California to Maine. Buffalo Willie had invented an original needle spray, standardized hydropaths had been provided with each shop. Thus it had been easy to account for every minute of Chester's time during these fifteen years of material success; easy to account for his nestling into the cushion of luxury with never a thought for Carlotta Beam and the ideals he had traded for mere tinsel.

Never a thought, did I say?

It was a late September morning and the Framms were taking late coffee in the breakfast room of their suite. Had you studied them there, as did the waiter who brought in a second helping of fresh butter, you would have said that they were father and daughter instead of man and wife. Chester had a limited imagination—Floss discovered that before she married him—but he had a capacity for hard work and was born with a powerful sense of responsibility which had acted con-

stantly as a check and a balance to his wife's amazing artistic flights.

The effort had aged him. There lay a nude strip along his skull between the bump of veneration and the mound of philoprogenitiveness. He was rather gray above the ears. His heavy noble face was deep-lined and he wore eyeglasses that trailed a mournful ribbon. Yet who would say that he was not a proud and happy man? Hay fever is the lightest of heavenly curses, and no husband has ever died of a wife who is always amusing even when she annoys. Every inch a colonel he looked that September morning.

But what had happened to Flossie Framm in the long wait between acts? Nothing, apparently. A microscope might have revealed crow's-feet at the corners of her wonderful eyes; possibly she had in some moment of confidence with herself plucked a half dozen silver threads from out the honey gold of her hair. But Flossie at thirty-seven was still a young girl, whereas Chester at forty-one was—ahem—middle-aged. There, I've said it!

Strange contrast, say you? Not in the least, say I. Floss had made her fortune by jumping chasms and not worrying about it; Ches-

ter had stood on the marge and held the rope for her. And in such a combination it is usually the rope holder who suffers from nervous strain.

"Floss," began the colonel, mangling the cube sugar in the bottom of his cup, "don't you think we can start back to the Coast?"

"Old Patch!" she trilled, dropping her paper. Floss read the papers less for the news than for weird and strange advertisements smuggled in remote corners. "I believe you're smoking too many cigars. No wonder you have the sneezes. If you'd only stick to cigarettes the way I do——"

"We're through with business here," he growled, "and we ought to get back."

"What would we be doing back?" she asked.

"Isn't that like you? I thought you were crazy about that new twenty-two-room house and the bungalow at San Rafael. And there are the children to consider."

"I think I'll sell 'em," replied Floss thoughtfully; then becoming aware of her husband's horrified look: "Not the children, of course, the messy old sweethearts! But your mother's looking after Eva and Buffalo Willie never lets Nat get out of his sight. Since I named the children for those two vain old things you may be sure nothing's going to happen to them. Besides, they're very easy to manage."

"Yes indeed," replied Chester A. Framm. "They're like their mother."

"Are you going to leave me or something, Chester?" she asked with one of her heartmelting looks.

"I've got over that stage," he grinned wickedly. "But what's the idea about selling our Pacific Coast property?"

"Oh, we wouldn't sell our Institute shops. Oh, no! Or our offices. Never, never, never! And we might rent the Presidio house to somebody who wants to start a hotel or keep boarders."

"Florabel!" He only called her that upon occasions. "Where are you going to stop?"

"I wasn't aware," she informed him, 'that I was going to stop anywhere."

"You never had an idea that didn't run up into the thousands."

"Easy come, easy go," she reminded him lightly, reaching down for the little pink slipper she had just kicked off.

"That house cost well over a hundred

thousand dollars. It was supposed to establish us for life---"

"I hope nothing will ever do that."

"Do you intend that we spend the rest of our time in hotels?"

"Nope. We'll have a home all right. But this time it'll be on Fifth Avenue."

"With what idea in view?"

"Ain't none, foolish. Only it's our move, that's all. You remember how I said, right after we were married, that we'd make squillions and squillions of dollars and I'd have your name a mile high on all the billboards? Well, didn't I keep my promise?"

Chester knew too well that she had. Had he cared to glance out of the window he would have seen a tall billboard blazing with "Colonel Framm says" and an impressionistic portrait of himself beside a giant's bottle of Angel Bloom.

"Yeppy, I kept my promise," she congratulated herself. "But we've worn out the Coast. We're considered very rich out there, but the best families always associate us with hair oil and cocoa-butter massage. Here it's different. We're merchant princes from afar, that's all. Framm's Institute sounds lovely and dignified and grand. Therefore we can just let out a mirthful whoop and take a high dive into the middle of Society. Cheer up, sexton, we'll be a long time dead!'

"Then you'll be wanting water-front property at Bar Harbor and rolling stock to match."

"Everything!" she cried enthusiastically. "Won't it be great, Goob? I've picked out two or three houses on the Avenue; I don't know whether we'll take the Florentine-morgue effect or the little white dungeon with the marble fruit cake over the door."

"Whichever you choose, you'll want to move out as soon as you get in. Look at the money we put into that San Francisco house. Look at that sunken garden! Think of what we paid that landscape architect! And those servants' quarters—great Scott! They're a hundred times more luxurious than the flat we started housekeeping in. And the banquet hall alone stood me nearly—"

"Goober," she interrupted in her best littlegirl voice, "what was your idea about that banquet hall?"

"Mine?" He tried to look stern, but only succeeded in looking guilty.

"You just would have one forty feet long with room for a hundred places. Old sly pie! Without a small angel to watch over your pillow you'd——"

"What are you driving at?" He tried to restrain a hanging tendency on the part of his lower jaw.

"Goober, you just perfectly and awfully well know that you had that room built specially so that you would get a chance to make big grand after-dinner speeches."

"Nothing of the sort!"

"You fun-ny little hero!" She came over and choked him with one of her caresses. "You won't ever get over wanting to be Cicero, will you?"

"And you'll never get over hating the very idea of my exercising my natural talent."

This was nothing new with the Framms. Chester had been breaking out like this on an average of twice a year.

"Is its poor little life all blighted and curled up because it wedded a piece of fluff?" she sympathized, and ran her fingers over the place where once she had rumpled his abundant hair.

"It's a little late for me to start in with a



'YOU WON'T INTRIGIT OVER WANTING TO BE CICERO, WHILE YOU?"

ALENA ALENA

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public career," he went on doggedly. "But at least I could learn to make a few graceful speeches—take up the thread of my life where it was when—"

"—when I came and busted it," she agreed.

"You never will take me seriously."

"Oh, awfully! I nearly cried the time you tried to address that street meeting in Cincinnati."

"Yes. And you ran a pin into my leg before I got started—and pretended it was a mistake."

"It was. A mistake to let you get started."

"Now that we're talking candidly," he growled, "I might as well tell you that I haven't been obtuse to the way you've tripped me, spiked me, put a spoke in the wheel every time I've tried to open my mouth in public. Good Lord, Floss, I'm neither tongue-tied nor an idot. Milton speaks of that one talent which is death to hide——"

"And your one talent is finance. Goober, you're the most reliable business man I ever saw. If you hadn't had a perfect genius for bookkeeping and stock reports and market conditions I'd have blown up the firm on an

average of twice a week for the last fifteen years. How many times would that make, Goob?"

"One thousand five hundred and sixty," he replied without the slightest hesitation.

"There! If I tried to add two and two I'd make it come out six," she complained.

"Yes," he admitted: "and you'd get away with it too."

"You're so unreasonable about me. What makes you think your angel is standing in the way of your great big mighty oratorical gifts?"

"Well," said he, "I started in by being a very promising speaker."

"Go on." She had resumed her chair and her cigarette.

"I began life by winning the William H. Barbour prize for oratory. I may have been a mere boy, but I made a decided impression on——"

"Weren't you fun-ny!" she rippled. "Standing there bellowing about William the Fruitman with old Doctor Pindar sitting behind the water pitcher looking like a sacred frog!"

"There you go again!"

"Goober, most sweetest, who ever told you

vou could make a speech?" It was an echo of the very jibe she had thrown at him that far-away night of triumph when he had sought her behind the palms in a boyish hope that she, too, would be impressed. The echo brought clarity to his mind. Undoubtedly Floss remembered Carlotta Beam, just as he remembered her. In that taunt the expression of a lifelong jealousy was sounded. Could it be possible that this strange, capable, frivolous little genius had shaped him into what he was in order to show Carlotta?

The tragic name was already on his lips, but he stayed it to grumble: "The greatest gift in the world, if it is purposely discouraged, starved and stunted, begins at last to atrophy and---"

"---mummify," she prompted; a way she had when he started a long sentence.

"---mummify. Before we were married you cried and made me promise never to make a speech without your consent. When I ordered a set of The Thousand Greatest Orations you changed the order so that when the books came they were The Thousand Greatest Recipes-"

"They were won-derful too!" she inter-

rupted. "I stole a formula for hair wash that we're still using in the Institute."

"Then when we'd begun to make money and the drug convention in Los Angeles asked me for a fifteen-minute address——"

"You didn't play fair. You sneaked away without my consent."

"That helped, didn't it? They'd just called my name at the speakers' table and I was getting on my feet when a boy came in with a telegram!"

"'Remember your promise—' that was what I wired," Floss reminisced.

"Yes," growled the Colonel, "and as a man of honor, of course, I had to sit down and put my ambition in my pocket."

"You were always an honest Injun," Floss admitted with a fond, proud glance.

"It's been that way from start to finish. If I tried to study law at night the books got lost or you started a phonograph in the next room. When we were struggling along there was some excuse—you could always say that my higher ambition cut into my working time. But these latter years there's no excuse. I've given up hoping to be a great public figure. But speech making is a graceful accomplish-

ment for a man of means. Not only that, but I've got time to look round—there are public offices and diplomatic posts open to rich men with the talent to fill them. Are you doing anything to help me? What did you play on me on my last birthday dinner?"

"I always did hate toasts," she objected. "And did you ever see a bromide that didn't love 'em? And you looked so fun-ny when you got up to respond—just the way you did that night when you won the big tin medal. I knew you'd thank me for interrupting——"

"With that awful story about how Aunt Het hugged the Chinaman when the Hyde Street car ran away downhill?"

"Well," she sighed, "people listened to it, didn't they?"

"Life's been just one interruption after another. Last September when the International Cosmetic Convention met in Pittsburgh I had a big chance. They offered to make me the orator of the evening. You pretended to give your consent. I spent two hard weeks working up that speech."

"It wasn't my fault that our machine got lost in the horrid old state of Pennsylvania and that we didn't get into Pittsburgh till eleven o'clock and all the Cosmetics were going home."

"No. It was merely an act of fate. It was also purely accidental that you slipped the chauffeur fifty dollars."

This was rather a heavy bit of sarcasm, but it bore the stamp of truth.

"Poor old Goober," she commiserated. "Who ever told you you could make a public speech?"

This was one jibe too many.

"Carlotta Beam told me," he blurted out.
"Told me a thousand times. And she was right. She had faith in me."

"Faith's a won-derful thing," she said, but it was not her voice that seemed to speak. For an alchemic moment her face had aged until it looked centuries old. "We built our fortune on faith, you know, old Goober."

He made no response, but sat fascinated by the strange wise scrutiny she was giving him.

"Faith can move mountains," she said, "but it often stubs its toe on molehills. Goober, I know how you feel sometimes. It's the way I used to want more hats and pretty clothes during those years we were living over the store—on faith. You didn't notice that, did

you? How you must long sometimes to find Carlotta and sit on a cloud and make big grand beautiful thoughts! Why don't you, Goober?"

"Don't I what?"

"Hunt up Carlotta."

Even in the thrall of this unique moment he hesitated before he confessed.

"I tried to once. That was about four years ago, when I was first traveling over the Coast for the Institute shops."

"Oh. And you found her?"

Florabel's smooth cheeks had deepened to peonies. Her eyes narrowed as she smiled. Again the little pink slipper had fallen off.

"No." Chester realized nervously that he must now finish what he had so ill begun. "It was an idle notion. But I wanted to ask—to ask if there was still a chance for me to develop along the old lines."

"You perfectly natural Goob!" said Floss, quite restored and even interested.

"I wasn't breaking any contract with you," he explained doggedly. "I didn't want to make a speech—but I did want to know about myself. I found Dyak pretty much run down. Old Pindar was dead and a fellow named

Mitchell had the chair of English Literature. Mitchell said that the Beams had been transferred to some small Eastern college several years ago and that he was under the impression that Carlotta had married a professional man—lawyer, politician—he wasn't sure which."

"Whatever he is," murmured Floss, "she must have made him very famous by now. Strange I haven't seen her picture in the papers next to the Swedish Ambassador of the Secretary of State or the Grand High Moocow of the Elks or——"

Her reflection broke off dramatically. It was evident that she was coming down with an idea.

"Goob!" she fairly shricked. "I've got it. Got it by two hind legs and a tail!"

"Yes?"

"You really truly want to make an appearance with miles of speakers' table all round you, thousands of faces wide open over their demitasses, champagne and limelights going off rapidly—and you standing there with the loveliest pearl-white corded-silk vest and diamond studs——"

"Crazy again!" was all he said. But the

years had taught him not to let it go at that.

"Yeppy. Testimonial banquet to Col. Chester A. Framm, of California, held in the Merlinbilt Gallery at eight-fifteen sharp on the evening of October eighteenth. Patrons of Honor: Hon. William H. Barbour, the Portuguese minister, Doctor Sergius van der Meer—and o-oh, Goober!"

Her eyes widened and she sat transfixed.

"Do you know who's stopping now at this very hotel?"

Chester couldn't guess, so Flossie was prompt to supply the information.

"Michael Henry Haroran! You know—that mouse-eyed old judge who tried the pink elephant for us?"

"He's Supreme Court Justice Haroran now," said Chester, repeating what everybody knew.

"I don't care if he's king of Europe," she declared; "I'll get him to head the list of patrons of honor."

"I'll bet you can't," he challenged.

"I'll bet I can," she took him up.

"Now let's hurry! You ring up The Spiggoty and tell him to come right over. And

I'll get dressed and see the management about hiring their banquet hall and——"

"Floss!" Chester would never learn. "You can't do anything like that. In the first place I don't know that I want to throw away several thousand dollars."

"Foolish, it won't cost us a cent. There are about ninety million people round New York who do nothing but wait for banquets with big names attached to them. Five dollars a plate and——"

"In the second place we're perfectly unknown here."

"That's the very thing we aren't going to be on the morning of October eighteenth. How does that listen to my sweetheart? Lifelong ambition all in a gob—presidents and senators and millionaires sitting round drinking your words and California champagne at Paris prices. What's the matter, Old Nuisance? Would um prefer some nice Bolsheviki meeting out on Union Square? Whatever you say, old dear."

This was astonishing. Apparently Floss had reversed herself in a manner hitherto unknown to that dextrously reversing character. Not only was she permitting his public

appearance—she was even forcing it on him. There must be a joker somewhere.

"Well, you might go ahead and see how you get along," he permitted.

"If I go ahead it'll get along," she assured him with her supreme conceit. "Now come on. We'll array ourselves in the rich embroideries befitting our station and tackle old Supreme Roar"—her version, apparently, of Supreme Court Justice Haroran.

When they were dressed for the adventure Chester was already committed to her program. He felt like a boy again.

"Lucky," said he, "that the change of climate has cleared up my——" He never mentioned the disagreeable malady.

"Your hay fever," she supplied. "It's the first time in ten years you haven't sneezed all the way from Halloween to Christmas."

"Getting away from those flowers always helps," he assured her.

The very thought of California's drying herbage gave him a gentle tickling at the base of his nose.

CHAPTER XIII

A FAVOR FROM THE SUPREME ROAR

THE Florabel Framm Technic or Quick Roads to Fame might with advantage be introduced as a text book in our leading commercial schools; and Chester's experiences of that late September morning should be written into an important chapter.

When she had got him into his braided morning coat and herself into one of the most exquisite creations from the workshop of Fluère she took a look in the mirror and said "Messy thing!" once or twice. The messy thing proved to be an eighty-dollar hat with a flowing white ostrich feather.

"I look like one of those Knights of Pythias," she commented.

Wherefore she tore off the white feather, tucked into its place a yard of cloudy blue velvet and was immediately cheered. Fluère might have imitated the effect. As a matter of fact one milliner did, so I am told.

"Come on, Mister Slow," she commanded; nd her smooth-coated spouse followed into ne first phase of the adventure.

The Supreme Roar occupied a suite on the ourth landing. When at last they were adnitted to his big reception room they found im deep in conference with many dignified entlemen of about his own age. Time as well s fortune had wrought dramatic changes in lichael Henry Haroran since the days of the ink elephant. The two hairy rodents, which till scampered across his forehead, had turned white mice and his once auburn hair had ow become a beautiful bank of snow. You ould have recognized him on or off the stage s the Supreme Court Justice. His large eavy voice had increased in volume and he ras, upon the entrance of the audacious ramms, lecturing upon the maritime laws of 852.

"The clipper ship Ben Harrow had now lost er status as a merchantman, and by the very ature of her cargo had reverted to—had everted to—"

Flossie Framm, never moving from her lace on the carpet, had undoubtedly hypnoized him. The Supreme Roar shut off the floodgates of the law and looked across the room. The white mice which had been playing tag across his forehead scampered up and hid under the snow bank. Then they ran down and rested still as death above the bright judicial eyes.

"Well, upon my word!" bellowed the great man, abandoning his audience and springing forward. "If this isn't Mrs. Framm!"

"Thank you, judge!" cried Flossie, accepting both his hands. "We nearly drowned listening to the clipper ship Ben Harrow, and neither of us can swim a stroke. What's a clipper ship, Judge Haroran?"

"Something, my dear, which was never designed for the comfort of tenderly reared young ladies. And what have we on our pretty mind to-day? Another pink elephant?"

Supreme Court Justice Haroran opened his large mouth and bellowed forth a salute to his own joke. Chester found himself tittering appreciatively, as one does when a great man jests. "Had I followed my star," he was thinking, "I too might be holding levees every morning and showering ponderous compliments upon the wives of obscure millionaires."

"It's a white elephant this time," Floss was saying.

"White?" The two mice of the same color stood up and performed an acrobatic feat.

"Yeppy. My husband."

"Ah, your husband!"

Judge Haroran remembered Chester long enough to shake him warmly by the hand.

"You hadn't much to say, as I remember it, during the celebrated case. But you were indeed fortunate in your choice of counsel, Mr. Framm."

"Colonel Framm," corrected Flossie.

"Colonel Framm," conceded Mr. Justice Haroran. "Suppose we go in here and sit down long enough for the clipper Ben Harrow to round Cape Horn."

He led them into a small green-and-gold anteroom and as soon as his guests were seated caused a spindling gilt chair to creak under his weight, for Judge Haroran was growing stout. He beamed amiably upon Chester, but the look he held for Flossie was sentimental in the extreme. Sentiment mingled with the impatient curiosity of a busy man.

"When I found that your name was on the

register," Floss went directly at her subject, "I cried—didn't I, Chester? That won-derful loan you made, and the won-derful way you did it!"

"Pshaw!" snorted the eminent one. "You paid it back in ninety days—fifteen minutes' margin. You're prompt as well as beautiful, my dear."

Chester jumped. Promptness was a virtue which he had never associated with his bride.

"Of course you thought I was crazy, judge. But you don't know what that money meant to us." There were tears in her bright eyes, and Chester was not scornful, for he knew that her whimsical words held but the plain truth. "Did you ever see a fly with just one leg stuck in the fly paper struggling and struggling to get loose, holding up its little paws to the other flies to come down and lend a hand? Nothing doing. Well, that was usonly different. Because we knew that if we ever got foot-free we could just walk over hills and mountains of precious stones. You pulled us out of the goo, judge. And here we are. Chester's one of the best-known public men in the state of California, and that five

thousand you lent us has swelled up to five millions. Isn't it five millions, Chester?"

"Seven," reported her financial head briefly.

"He's won-derful at figures. Chester, how many skin specialists do we employ in our institutes all over the country?"

"A hundred and twenty-two."

"Just listen at him! And everything's in proportion. And that's why we've come to you, Judge Haroran."

"To me? I'm charmed."

"You see the colonel's public duties have kept him pretty much on the Coast. But when the Golden Poppy Society heard that we were intending to make New York our headquarters they came round to us and fairly begged to be allowed to give the colonel a testimonial banquet."

Judge Haroran looked surprise; not half so surprised as Chester A. Framm felt at that moment.

"I've been away from California for seven years," he confessed. "What is this Golden Poppy Society?"

"I thought ev-erybody had heard of the Golden Poppy Society," she murmured, looking truly disappointed. "If's quite a new

organization—just being formed by people who have come away from the Coast. Object: To make Californians feel at home in New York."

"I feel slighted not to have been asked," intimated Haroran with a wink at Chester.

"I'll have them put your name down right away."

"Ah. When is this testimonial banquet to be held?"

"On the eighteenth of October," she replied without the least hesitation. "It's to be held in the Merlinbilt banquet hall; or possibly in the Waldoria or the Fitz-Caldron. That hasn't been decided. But the main point is you."

"Me?" he queried, forgetting his Supreme Courtly grammar.

"It's a sort of delicate point, judge. Honest, I don't know how to begin."

Plainly she was confused by her own audacity, for one of her most becoming blushes suffused her cheeks. Judge Haroran leaned over and stroked her hand, a fatherly caress.

"You surely wouldn't be bashful with me!" he coaxed.

"There! You've made it better, old dear.

Now I'm going to say it all in one breath. The Golden Poppies want your name to head the list of patrons, but they didn't have the nerve to ask. And I insisted, sort of, so they told me that I'd have to do it. So here we are. It was a mean trick to play on me, judge, and if you feel like sentencing me and the colonel for sixty-five or seventy days——"

A secretarial young man had now intruded upon the conversation and stood conspicuously apart, in the way secretarial young men have.

"What is it, Sherman?" asked the great man, truly annoyed at the interruption.

"Judge Wimbleton, sir."

"Oh, yes. Tell him I'll be right in." Then he returned to the subject of interest. "So they made you do the hard work, my dear? Well, well!"

"And will you?" she pleaded breathlessly. "Cer-tainly! Cer-tainly! What date did you say?"

"October eighteenth. Aren't you a darling?"

Judge Haroran smiled reminiscently. Probably she had said just that the day he signed the check.

"H-m. Use my name—delighted. And you'll excuse me, won't you?"

"How can you be so nice and be a lawyer?" cooed Flossie, rising with him.

'It has been done," he admitted, giving his illustrious hands to both the Framms at once

And here was where Floss really delivered her stroke:

"If I had the nerve to ask—you won't kill me, will you?"

"Girl-slaughter is one of the luxuries denied the Supreme Court," he grinned.

"Well, do you think you would have time to come and sit at the speakers' table and make a speech?"

The white mice, which had remained dormant during most of the parley, now began leaping one over the other, threatening escape from the judicial forehead.

"My dear," he growled, "what in the world would I speak about?"

"Oh, I could think up a speech."

"Ah. And what would it be, my dear?"

"The Supreme Court has just passed a thingumajig to discourage those horrid patent-medicine fakers. Suppose you talk about that." The secretarial young man had again encroached and stood suggestively at the threshold.

"I'll be here until Friday," said Judge Haroran. "Good morning—and you may use my name on the program."

When the Framms got out into the hall they moved silently upon the lift, which they took up to the eleventh floor, the scene of their apartment.

"What's this Golden Poppy Society?" grumbled Chester as soon as they had got out on the landing.

"It's me," said Floss. "I thought it up while we were going down in the elevator."

They found The Spiggoty waiting patiently, as the Framm press agent should, in the drawing-room of their suite. It was a fashionable Spig now, addicted to robin's-egg-blue collars and tan-topped shoes, adornments becoming to his Latin type of beauty. He had represented the Framm publicity in the East for many years, hence had become a sturdy Broadwayite.

"Spig!" shouted Floss, pulling off her smart headpiece and waving it till the blue velvet fell out of the crown. "Hell is popping out of Harlem. Let's jazz!"

She fell into his deft embrace and together they executed a few steps of the latest contortion.

"Whose life have you been spoiling now?" asked the Spaniard as soon as he had recovered his breath.

"Chester's," she announced enthusiastically. "The Golden Poppy Society of California is going to tender him a grand testimonial banquet on the evening of October eighteenth."

"The Golden which?"

"Poppy Society. It isn't formed yet."

"Well, who's going to form it?"

"You are."

"Am I?"

"Yeppy. Right away. What are we paying you twelve thousand a year for? Therefore you must go forth into the byways and shyways and pick up all the Californians you find loose—most of 'em are. I give you fortyeight hours. Sort 'em out, dust 'em off, find out who's the richest and make him president. Then say that Supreme Court Justice Haroran and the Hon. William H. Barbour want the society to give Chester a banquet."

"Barbour's never said he would lend his name," was Chester's comment.

"He will," was Flossie's.

"Man can die but once," was The Spiggoty's.

So together they put on their hats and went out into the world.

Floss came back with William H. Barbour's scalp and other trophies at the dressing hour that night.

"He was a crosspatch," she informed Chester as her maid was hooking her into a pink thing with an exaggerated V in the back. "But I told him that Judge Haroran was to be speaker of the evening and that you had made your start in life—ahem!—by winning the William H. Barbour medal. The old thing looks like a giant ground sloth. If he ever runs for President again I'm going to vote the socialist ticket. But he's fallen in love with me—the way prehistoric mammals fell in love with the top leaves on carboniferous trees. Ain't that a grand word?"

"And he lent his name?" shouted Chester from the other room, where he was having his lawn tie caressed by a Japanese valet. "Sure! He wouldn't let the Supreme Roar get ahead of him. But when I asked him to speak he showed his buck teeth and I got out before he began nibbling the feathers off my hat. And I've seen all the banquet halls in New York. There's one in the Waldoria with a picture of Venus and Apollonaris spraddled all over the ceiling. I'm sure it was painted by a German, it's so vulgar and homelike."

"Which one are we going to take?" asked Chester, who, his evening tie having been knotted, appeared beside his wife's mirror.

"All the hotel proprietors are jealous as opera singers. You never saw the beat of it! I really believe if we keep it up they'll pay us to give that banquet. It seems they lose money every night their banquet halls are empty, and when I told them I wanted one they followed me round like regular Romeos. One of the proprietors—the fat one with the nice eyes—offered to supply a list of people. But the manager of the Merlinbilt was the wildest of the lot. He promised to furnish all the printing, including twenty-five hundred invitations and souvenir menus with your photo in a frame of golden poppies. I think we'll choose the Merlinbilt, after all."

"And the matter of guests?" suggested the practical-minded Framm.

"Jersey is full of people who do nothing but sit round waiting for the next banquet. Five dollars a plate is nothing to them. The manager says he knows a Tammany Hall assemblyman who wants to be governor. Won't we have the grand speeches?"

"I'll see a nose-and-throat specialist in the morning," soliloquized Chester, "and have him make sure that my"—he almost said hay fever—"my condition is all right. Then I'll go to work composing my speech."

"What are you going to talk about, Old Brutal?"

She had been turning her vain little head from left to right, but he could see that her reflection was studying him from the mirror.

"Ahem. The Secret of Success."

"The Secret of Success!"

She turned and struck a pompous pose.

"Great Scott! Haven't you got over mocking me?"

"Kiss me quick—and let's go down to dinner. The Spiggoty's brought his new wife. Jealous little dog, he just married her to spite me! Then we'll have the Hector Macawbers and the Phil Jasons. Oh, gosh!"

She breathed deep.

The Macawbers and the Jasons were rich people on the fringe of society, whom the Framms had encountered in a business way. Briefly, they were large stockholders in the perfumery trust.

"Light stuff!" remarked Chester, studying the public manner so soon to be his by right.

"Aren't they! We're going to leap from roof to roof all night, stopping to dance wherever it's noisiest. I'm wild to dance! I want to whirl and whirl till I'm sick for the rest of my natural life. Hurry up, pokums! I seem to be always waiting for you to finish dressing."

Which was justice as administered by Florabel Framm.

CHAPTER XIV.

ONE GOLDEN NIGHT

This is not an account of a public execution, but I am forced to admit that, as would befit an execution, the morning of October eighteenth dawned clear and cold and the prisoner after a restless night awoke early and ate a hearty breakfast of ham and eggs.

"You ought to stop going over that thing," Flossie told him, remarking that his lips were moving over his coffee cup. "A real bright actor once told me that the more you say your part over the worse you get. He said that once he was playing Shakspere or Omar Khayyam—some grand play—and he'd been saying his speech over to himself so long that he forgot how to talk, so they had to ring down the curtain in the middle of the big automobile scene because—"

"Don't!" groaned the miserable creature.

"Don't what?" She dropped the morning paper and looked truly alarmed. "There! If

you don't get your mind off that oration you'll have a gallstone attack or something. Let's be cheerful in spite of the banquet. Did you see the lovely, lovely souvenir menu cards the management is getting out? Take it home and try it on your piano."

She fluttered over to a table and brought back two samples of the Merlinbilt's sumptuary art, and one of these she dropped on the table beside the nervous prisoner's ham and eggs.

Chester was aware of the blue-and-gold marvel which framed his own features, wonderfully reproduced in soft brown tints. It was a fine portrait of a man, thought Chester, and should he make good to-night the likeness would serve splendidly to advertise the new senator from California or our next ambassador to the Court of St. James. On the first inside page there swam before his eyes the pompous list which was to make the occasion notable:

PATRONS OF HONOR

Mr. Justice Michael Henry Haroran Hon. William H. Barbour Baron da Camoens BARONESS DA CAMOENS
DR. SERGIUS VAN DER MEER
SIG. HENRICI CRUSOE
THE EARL OF DUFF
LADY DUFF

"The Spiggoty tells me," Floss enthused at this interval, "that this is the finest list of patrons that never came to a banquet."

"You mean to say they're not coming!" Chester said this with a tone of relief.

"Mister Simple! Patrons of honor never go to the dinners they patronize. They just put down their names and go to the movies. But Spig's arranged it so that all the papers will say: 'Among those present were Mr. and Mrs. William H. Barbour, the Earl and Earless of Duff'—whole tribes of famous people. Just keep your mind on that, boss. Two or three ex-Presidents, a whole flock of colonels, the world's champion middleweight tenor, ambassadors of every shape, size and color. And then I've loaned twenty-two of my ball gowns, and Ethel Macawber's loaned twelve and Belle Jason four—"

"Furnishing clothes for the patronesses?"

he grunted, his mind still wild with the details of that speech.

"Somebody's got to sit in the galleries—haven't you thought of that? Spig and I fixed it. Belle and Ethel have loaned all their servants and told them to bring friends.

"I see."

"And tickets! Goob, we've got to crush seven million people into a room that holds less than five hundred. Of course we'll be raided by the police. Won't it be furious?"

The telephone rang.

"Hello, Spig!" crowed Florabel into the mouthpiece. "Yeppy!... Oh, he's all right, except his lips—they're sort of blue. . . . I know, it's a disgrace the way we'll have to overcrowd them. . . . What's that? Open up the Klondike gamblers' next door and hold an overflow?

"That's a grandiloquent thought, old lovely. Be here at eleven-thirty and we'll hang the bunting. Good-by."

"I'm going out," gulped Chester A. Framm.
"That's right, sweetheart. Walk and ride
and jump into the river. Go see your eyenose-ear-throat-lung-and-brain specialist, but

don't fail to get back by six. I've got to hang you all over with clothes to-night."

It was evident that Floss was taking her excitement in her own particular way.

Chester went moodily forth, a prey to anxiety on the eve of greatness. His destination was the specialist of innumerable talents whom his wife had mentioned, but his walk that morning was a meandering affair. The past few weeks had been audacious weeks and Chester had a feeling that he was getting run down and needed a rest in some quiet island where even the birds were forbidden to sing. How the efficient Spiggoty had formed, almost over-night, the now vigorous Golden Poppy Society; how he had pitted a California real-estate operator and a Califronia congressman one against the other in the race for the Poppies' presidency; how deftly Floss had dined Mr. Junius McKoncle, made him president of the Poppies and wheedled him into the Framm-testimonial idea; how Floss had used the great names of Barbour and Haroran as loadstones to draw to her other great names; how the newspapers had taken up the enterprise, now in satire, now in praise-all this had become ancient history to him.

His principal thought was upon himself, his speech. Even at this late date there were certain points where the oration could be bettered by a few local touches perhaps—or reference to the national situation. The most eminent platform favorites had a way of passing gracefully from the general to the particular. Possibly his style was a little severe and classic. Possibly it would have been better had he borrowed a few of Flossie's epigrams—the one about the New York Subway playing whale to five million Jonahs. Undignified.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the Golden Poppy Society: It is with mingled pain and joy that I stand before you to-night and acknowledge the high compliment which, in my heart of hearts, I know that I have done so little to deserve—"

"Hear! Hear!" a mocking echo of Floss was shouting in his ears.

"—— pain because this glimpse of so many dear home faces awakens in my breast sad memories of happy hours now forever vanished and gone."

He had gone over this paragraph on an average of thirty times a day for the last

twenty days. "How many times does that make, old Nuisance?" Floss would have asked him just to test his arithmetical genius. He had never uttered the speech in Floss' hearing. What he needed after all was sympathy and understanding. For instance, what comfort it would have given him could he have laid the case before his wife, secure in the feeling that she would know and help! Hadn't he put too much stress on the pain he was hypothetically confessing at the sight of so many faces of bygone days? Possibly a joyous note! How was it that Floss had expressed the Subway and Jonah? Oh for a true counselor out of his difficulty? Carlotta. . . .

It was some minutes after one o'clock when he finished his reverie and limped into the office of the helpful throat-and-nose specialist.

Half past six. Chester slouched back to his apartment in the Merlinbilt, and it enraged him somehow to find Flossie mirthfully passing cocktails to The Spiggoty and The Spiggoty's bride. Already they were rigged like the clipper Ben Harrow. Mrs. De Silva, a lithe saucer-eyed blonde, had been married out of the chorus, and in order to maintain her

new status she behaved in a manner which was dignified to the verge of paralysis.

"The funeral is kept waiting and the corpse not dressed yet!" Floss began it almost before he had come into the room.

"Floral tributes a mile high," chipped in The Spiggoty, whose manner toward Chester sometimes held an annoying remnant of Gamma superiority.

"Flowers!" moaned Chester.

The telephone rang, smothering further protests.

"You answer it, Spig," drawled Floss, still pleased to see her dark adorer waiting on her.

De Silva sprang to the receiver. His bride stiffened slightly.

"What's the name, please?... Oh! J. Fawcett Tweed? Yes, Mr. Tweed." The Spiggoty turned and winked at his audience... "No, he isn't in... I can't say, Mr. Tweed. Sorry... Good-by."

"J. Fawcett Tweed!" gurgled The Spiggoty as he smote his sides and came back to the table.

"What does he want?" asked Floss, apparently not understanding the situation.

"To make a speech," declared De Silva, and gurgled some more.

"Clown! What did you snub him for? Who knows what? Possibly State Senator Plother'll break down or fall in a faint. Maybe we'll need help——"

"From that bum?" upspoke The Spiggoty in scorn and derision. "Do you know what Tweed is? Broken-down shyster, disbarred, thrown out of every club in New York. Why, for twenty-five dollars he'd——"

A knock at the door.

"Come in!" sang out the Framms in unison.

A page brought in an envelope on a silver tray. It was a sample of the Merlinbilt's best pearl-gray stationery, and Floss after breaking the seal smiled faintly and handed it over to her husband. It was scrawled in an untidy, shaky hand. A dissipated rather than an old hand, he would have said had he been any chirographer.

"Distinguished Sir: Knowing that every moment is of value to you I will not detain you with protestations. But probably you will recognize my name and see in me one who may be of benefit upon this occasion. I am

ready at a moment's notice to deliver a speech of any length and upon any designated topic. I can recite from the poems of James Whitcomb Riley or my own humorous compositions. I have a repertoire of inimitable anecdotes and my eulogistic themes are unexcelled. My terms are reasonable. Twenty-five dollars for—"

Framm tore the note savagely across its impertinent face and rushed into his dressing room, whither Floss patiently followed in order, according to her promise, to drape him all over with things.

Chester had shaken hands all round in the large reception room outside the banquet hall. Like a hero already established in public life he had stood next to Mr. Justice Haroran and permitted the world to pay him tribute at five dollars a plate. It had been a confusion of pomp, dressed to the last degree of splendor. Floss in a coral evening gown, glittering with jewels, had looked a little queen and thus far had behaved with dignity in keeping with the occasion. Fame was already here. The great heart of Chester A. Framm swelled be-

yond the confines of his well-cut shirt front. He heard complimentary voices and said complimentary things. He forgot what he said, but it was much and meant little. His one disagreeable impression was that of a slimy, puffy creature with a face like a mushroom and an abominably ornamental shirt who pumped his hand and introduced himself as J. Fawcett Tweed. So the twenty-five-dollar Demosthenes had risked his five on a chance.

"Yes, he did!" whispered De Silva, when the suggestion was made. "He grafted his way on the management."

The band struck up a patriotic tune and Chester, ushered in by another door, led the grand march to the speakers' table, Mr. Mc-Koncle, president of the Golden Poppy Society, lending him a worshipful arm. The vast roomful of guests rose as to royalty. The band was blaring mighty music; the room was hung with blue and gold. Chester all but swooned in the ecstasy of it.

He had little time for either hope or fear during that mad, glad meal. The waiter poured much wine, which the object of the testimonial swallowed nervously and at frequent intervals. The president of the Poppies, who flanked him on the left, and Mr. Justice Haroran, who hedged him in on the right, were in a bantering mood. Public occasions were nothing to them, and Chester answered their sallies as best he could, wetting his dry lips with vintage wine.

Probably Floss was right when she had warned that the more he said his speech over the worse it got. At a prominent table right under his nose he could see the witch, who had already dropped her ceremonial manner and was having the time of her life with The Spiggoty. The chorus-girl bride sat haughty and cold next to an affable little fellow who was attempting most feverishly to break the ice. Why had Floss arranged this great event? Were things as they seemed? Did she actually, by a freak of pride, hope to launch him publicly, to give him his heart's desire in one golden evening?

It was a golden evening indeed. Masses of gold centered acres of tablecloths. From a giant chandelier in the center of the room festoons of a brilliant yellow something drooped gracefully to the galleries, which were already bright with pretty domestics in Flossie's clothes. Gold, gold everywhere. Some sort

of flowers—the thought of flowers increased his nervousness. But the Supreme Court Justice was at that moment telling him a comic story which required attention.

At last the president of the Poppies tinkled his glass for silence and Chester enjoyed the wild illusion that the terrapin he had eaten had come to life and was crawling, shell and all, in the pit of his stomach. He gulped another glass of wine just as the toastmaster burst into his song of praise. Mr. McKoncle drove his musical chariot up the western rainbow and down the other side. The whitetipped peaks of the Sierras got their share, the sun-kissed missions of the Padres still more. Mr. McKoncle, who had made his first million building new old missions in the West, knew what he was talking about until he got on the subject of Col. Chester A. Framm. But even on that unfamiliar ground he knew that Framm had endowed the University of Dyak until it "bade fair," to use the speaker's phrase, "to rival-nay, outrival any similar institution in the Western Hemisphere."

Chester looked down at Flossie. She had just said something behind her hand to The Spiggoty. Chester sensed trouble in the air.

He seemed to smell it. The tickling at the base of his nose——

It requires a long time for a man to be hanged, when you take everything into account. Ceremonies and occasions are mostly designed for the purpose of drawing things out. Chester's upper lip was beaded with moisture, vet there was no reason in the world why, being an intelligent man, he should not have enjoyed what Judge Haroran said about him. The judge, it seemed, was in a reminiscent mood, and the term "pink elephant" was frequently heard, followed by laughter. Chester was deep in the heights, if the paradox is admissible. The judge's anecdotes went so well that Chester twice made up his mind to begin with Floss' quip about the Subway. Twice he vetoed it. The judge finished, after poking two or three jokes at himself on the subject of the Patent Medicine Bill.

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State Senator Plother proved so longwinded that the guest of honor had about made up his mind that the meeting would close without him after all. The state senator was mostly worried about the unjust things that had been said against Tammany Hall. After an age he got down and President McKoncle rose, beaming lovingly upon the evening's martyr.

And at that moment Chester realized what it was he smelled. There it lay, just beyond arm's reach opposite his plate—a wonderful glowing harrow of it, a foot high and stretching the full length of the speakers' table. Goldenrod!

"Waiter!" he hissed, beckoning to some phantom.

"Hst!" warned Justice Haroran, squeezing his arm. "The toastmaster's talking about you."

"That goldenrod!" the miserable wretch tried to explain.

Haroran merely smiled, the activity of his two white mice indicating that this was a strange moment for the admiration of botany.

"—and like all great men, a simple character," McKoncle was raving his eulogium. "Despite the greatness of our nation—which no man lives so base as to deny—I might say that from California has come the finest flower of our manhood. Speaking of flowers, might I tell briefly, before the speaker of the evening begins, what Mrs. Framm said to me only last week? You should all know Mrs.

Framm, that charming, sweet-voiced helpmeet who by her silent counsel and soothing woman's touch has blazed the way to success. We were conferring in the matter of decorations. 'The decorations must be blue and gold,' I said. 'Yes,' said the dear little woman, 'but it's too bad we can't find any poppies. My Chester so loves the poppy.' And then she had one of her flashes of inspiration. 'Goldenrod!' she said."

So that was it! Chester leaned far over the table and in a frenzy attempted to poke the yellow, seedy, sneeze-producing bank away with his fork. It was just beyond the tines. He settled back. Perspiration was now rolling from his forehead down to his collar. The effort was superhuman.

"—and over the glorious goldenrod of the East the man who has so well honored the poppy of the West will rise to greet you. Col. Chester A. Framm."

"He's calling on you," whispered Haroran's kindly voice in his ear.

Chester swam to his feet. His eyes were rapidly filling with tears. But they were neither the tears of patriotism nor of remorse.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the Golden Poppy

Society," he began well enough: "It is with mingled pain—"

His watering eyes traveled down and rested again upon that bank of goldenrod.

Ka-choo!

The audience sat politely still.

"It is with mingled pain-"

Ka-choo! Ka-choo! Ka-choo!

"Will somebody—" Choo! "—those damned flowers away!"

And Chester sat down, volleying as he sat.

CHAPTER XV

KATZENJAMMER

THE Framms got through the week following the Golden Poppy Society's banquet less smoothly than was their wont. Chester staved in bed several days and Floss nursed him; nursed him like the heroic little gadfly that she was. It was plain to see that she was sorry; moreover, there was never a nurse who could handle his hav fever as Floss could. During those sleepless nights his most endearing word to her was a sneeze. She made no complaint. She was used to it. In silent intervals Chester turned his face to the wall and asked with increasing bitterness what domestic miracle had kept them together these eccentric years. Almost from the first their match had been as ill assorted as that of a lion yoked to a humming bird. He saw it all now; and as he saw it he sneezed again. A wild flame had burned between them in their early days, a roseate vapor which had thrown all things out of their true perspective; but there was no denying the fact that they were growing middle-aged and mutually critical. Floss had played him once too often.

Then she would come in wearing something original, alluring and young, which would have the effect of reversing all Chester's opinions. Floss was not middle-aged, and so far as he could calculate she never would be.

However, he was determined that he would not forgive her that perfidious cluster of goldenrod. The very memory of it sent him into a passion of sneezing. He seemed to have lost all interest in everything else. And yet the dinner had gone off wonderfully well, thanks to the big-hearted deception of Judge Haroran, who after the colonel's first nasal volley had come to his feet and informed the banqueters that Colonel Framm, who had been threatened with Spanish influenza, had risen from a sick bed to attend the testimonial. Whereupon the Supreme Court Justice had lifted his two white mice and his roaring voice in a remarkable speech setting forth important views on the Internationalization of Inland Waterways. Chester had stuck it out,

weeping hay-feverishly into his napkin, then had stolen away through a side door.

After five days of mourning, sneezing, introspection and more sneezing Chester got suddenly better and decided to sit up. Flossic insisted upon swaddling his legs in a blue steamer rug, but his convalescence was rapid and he was able to show his teeth when she marched demurely in with a sizable bundle of newspapers, which, sans explanation, she dumped into his lap.

"What are these?" he snarled.

"What do you think they are, old patch—a plate of oranges? There, Lamb Pie, I'll tell you what they are: Morning of October nineteenth; full account of the Framm testimonial banquet. You haven't seen 'em yet. Shall I read 'em to my Goob?"

"Give me my glasses," he commanded icily. And sustained by the lenses he was able to see that the dinner had been, from a standpoint of publicity, an overwhelming success.

"Col. Chester A. Framm Stricken With Influenza at Banquet" was a favorite. But none so brief as to fail in describing the magnificent decorations, the list of distinguished guests, the eloquence of President McKoncle and the epoch-making importance of Judge Haroran's second speech. The portraits of Michael Henry Haroran and Chester A. Framm were linked together on many pages. One illustrated supplement gave a flashlight of the banquet. Never, perhaps, in the history of journalism has a sneeze been recorded with such pomp and circumstance.

"Now look here, Floss," declared her husband, shoving the papers off to the floor, "this is all very well. But you played a silly vulgar practical joke on me at a time in my life when my dignity counted for everything. You hired the biggest hall in New York and got the greatest list of names in America—for what? For the satisfaction of giving me hay fever."

"God gave you hay fever," she responded piously.

"Bosh! What sort of a mind have you? For a woman of your age—"

"I'm not a woman of my age!" she took him up sharply.

"I withdraw that statement," he admitted. "But you do talk more like a—a—"

"Flapper," she prompted him.

"You go at things like a child of twelve, not in the least realizing what you're meddling with. The sort of cheap and flashy success you've been engineering for me all these years has given you an unlimited conceit——"

"Don't you talk to me like that!" she cried, showing what in her he had never seen all the years of their married life. They had never been candid enough to quarrel.

She had brought a heel of her frivolous slipper down crushingly upon the carpet. Her useless little hands were clenched, as was the line of teeth, which showed whitely against the angry flush.

"Floss-my dear girl-my darling child-"

"I married you out of a steam laundry!" she lashed out, using the voice of another and terrible being. "You didn't bring me anything but—love; and there wasn't a rag of pride that I didn't throw to the dogs to make something out of you—out of nothing. Conceit! My word—and you wanted to be an orator!"

"I'm sorry," he moaned. But she was flouncing out of the room.

He struggled to rise and follow her. The feat was impossible because, as it turned out, she had fastened the steamer rug round him with a complicated system of safety pins.

He lay back and tried to consider his case. They had been married fifteen years; and lo, and behold! here was an entirely new and unknown Floss.

Comic Relief walked in at that moment, the character being impersonated by Mr. Ramon de Silva. Chester could hear them chatting quite frothily in the next room; and Chester's introspective self was poisoned by the thought which, strange as it may seem, was voiced by Floss as soon as she came into his presence, blithely leading The Spiggoty.

"Goober and I are thinking of getting a divorce," she announced in quite her regular manner. "But I don't know how 'bout it, Spig. You're the only other man I'd endure as a husband. And you've gone and spilled the rice by marrying Sissy."

The Spiggoty, who was wearing one of his robin's-egg-bluest collars, indicated the same spiritual shade as he fastened his somber eyes upon the woman to whom, as Chester always realized, he had given his lifelong devotion.

"A month late!" smiled the Spaniard. "Usually you arrange things better, Floss."

"Oh, I could go and see Sissy. I don't

think she likes you any better than you do her."

"Floss!" In spite of Chester's vow not to speak that way to her again the interjection seemed necessary.

"The doctor, madam," interposed Floss' maid, appearing dramatically at the door.

"You two poor dears fix it up to suit yourselves," little Mrs. Framm commanded, and went to meet Chester's specialist.

"Sit down," commanded Framm desperately, motioning his press agent to the nearest chair. "Spig, Floss and I have been quarreling."

"Why shouldn't you?" asked The Spiggoty, shrugging his worldly shoulders. "You're married, aren't you?"

"But this is different. I've known you better than any other man alive these fifteen years, Spig, and I can be forgiven for talking right out. Floss and I have never talked like this—we've ragged and tagged, but it has always been a true-love match—possibly that's what's the matter with it. Never like this before. Why, we came right out and told the truth."

"What is the truth?" asked The Spiggoty sadly as Pilate might have done.

"Floss said that she picked me out of the garbage can and made a millionaire out of me. That's true. I said that in doing so she had wrecked my better self and utterly perverted me."

"The trouble with you, Ches, is that you're so damned young," was The Spiggoty's surprising diagnosis.

"Young!" he snorted. "I'm ages older than Floss."

"No, you're not—nobody is."

"Huh! At any rate things have come to a crisis. We've got to separate."

"As bad as that?"

"My boyhood ambition was to study law. With Floss round, Blackstone would look like a dime novel. I'm rich enough to indulge my tastes; and my tastes are all for a serious public career in which Floss has no part. That's the case in a nutshell."

"I see."

The Spiggoty pondered. It was rather a fine face which this olive-skinned Latin had developed in his early middle life. Strange to say, there was a certain lingering poetry in

it. Here, too, was possibly a story of perverted ideals. Floss had turned him from a proud Castilian knight into a superexcellent press agent.

"When I'm gone—out of her life," the sick man enjoined with an impetuous rush of confidence, "I want you to look after her. Floss has got something like genius; but like most geniuses she couldn't live a week without a business manager. I've given up fifteen valuable years to that. Now I'm determined to resign—and be myself."

"Ches," said De Silva at last with one of his dark smiles, "that's a splendid program you've blocked out for yourself. Splendid!"

"Well, what's the matter with it?"

"It lacks the one thing to make it a success."

"What's that?"

"Floss."

"You mean I can't get along without her?" "Well, can you?"

Chester A. Framm said nothing intelligible, but started to cry. This may be forgiven in a man who was at once ill, tired and disappointed.

When Floss came in with the doctor the

patient's moisty visage could be easily accounted for as glandular irritation. Doctor Sumner, who nicely combined the social and scientific training necessary to professional success, went over the nose and its tributary canals before declaring that there wasn't much the matter with the colonel any more.

"Now I'm going to recommend a treatment," he smiled, "which is painless, pleasant and expensive. No, I'm not going to send you to Palm Beach or Hot Spings. The health resort I am referring to is right round the corner. Broadway, it's called."

"Broadway!" snarled the patient, who had undoubtedly reached the disagreeable stage of convalescence.

"Mrs. Framm tells me that you have been taking life much too seriously—all work and no play. Your condition is a nervous one, brought on by strain—no relaxation. Now I may be thrown out of the profession for saying so, but in my opinion Broadway has saved more lives than it has wrecked. The only way to stop a worry is by forgetting it. Two weeks of musical comedy, dancing—"

"I don't dance," objected Chester, who had

always regarded Terpsichore as the idiot sister among the muses.

"You'll have fun learning," said Doctor Sumner. "If time hangs heavy on your hands you can go to tea dances in the afternoons. Or hire a phonograph and have your wife give you lessons here in the hotel."

"I'll die first," he groaned.

"Chuck Connors used to say that he could die dancing," grinned the physician. "I am quite serious in this, colonel. There's nothing in the world the matter with you now but nervous depression."

It was queer, but Chester at that moment entertained a vision of the late Aunt Het so strangely like Floss—who had killed three successive husbands and had made a frivolous speech from her death bed.

"I'll turn you over to Mrs. Framm," the doctor was going on. "I'm sure she will prove an excellent nurse for you. You don't object to dancing, do you, Mrs. Framm?" Doctor Sumner beamed.

"I know a few steps," admitted Floss.

"The little devil," thought her disillusioned victim; "if she had paid more attention to her

head and less to her heels to-day's estrangement had never come to pass."

"I would suggest that the treatment begin at once," urged Doctor Sumner, taking his hat for departure. "If you will telephone me in the morning at about twelve and let me know——"

As soon as he was gone Mr. and Mrs. Framm and Ramon de Silva occupied chairs in triangular formation and sat, hands folded, staring into the vague. For the first time in her life Floss seemed to have nothing to say. When Chester focused his weary eyes upon the situation he observed that his wife and friend were regarding him earnestly from their equilateral corners.

"Floss," growled her husband, "I'll bet you put the doctor up to that simple-minded Broadway treatment."

"There he goes again!" Floss turned to The Spiggoty as a witness. "You see, nothing ever happens but what he blames it on me."

CHAPTER XVI

THE BROADWAY REST CURE

"What sort of a rest-cure sanitarium have you picked out for to-night?"

It was about seven o'clock on the evening of the same day, and the Framms were busily engaged in arraying themselves as for a great occasion. Strange as it may seem, Chester, whose lawn tie was at that moment being folded by his skillful Japanese, appeared to be anything but an invalid. This, perhaps, was due to the whimsicality of nervous diseases.

"Esther," said Floss to the maid, who was hooking her up, "please be careful and tuck those ribbons down in the back. Last time you left them hanging out and I had to bribe the waiter to——"

"Florabel," persisted her husband, striding sternly to the door, "I asked you a question."

"Uh-huh." He could see her rosy reflection beaming at him from the mirror. "The

place we are going? It's a joint. They call it Hannigan's Bedlam Cabaret."

"Where do you learn about all those vicious places?"

"Don't give me all the credit. It's the Macawbers' party—I got old Hector on the phone and he declared that The Bedlam is the place where the dissipated people go. They've asked the Phil Jasons, and, of course, I coaxed them to include The Spiggoty and his dippy bride. It's one of those places where everybody pulls the tablecloth off after twelve and you can do the dance of the seven napkins without being thrown out."

"I think Doctor Sumner's a quack," grumbled Chester, about to turn back toward his own dressing room.

"Chet, dear," she called after him, her Angel Bloom complexion adding charm to the mirrored visage he saw and worshiped in spite of himself, "I've been wondering something about you ever since that Golden Poppy night. If you made a speech what would you talk about?"

"Huh. You wouldn't be interested."

"You're horrid!" The reflection sulked.

"Why should you be interested?"

"I always did adore mental diseases. When my Uncle Dab Fuller went crazy and thought he was Cleopatra——"

"If that's the sort of thing you like you'll like that sort of thing."

He turned and took his empurpled visage to his own mirror. He pretended he didn't see her lovely reflection standing coaxingly behind his a moment later; pretended to ignore the girlish slenderness of her white arms and the smooth, spirited little neck as pearly as the gems that encircled it. She had to reach up to draw his face round toward hers.

"Now tell me, Old Brutal! What sort of a grand speech would it prefer to make?"

"With you round jeering at me?"

"Suppose I was dead and—and you'd married Carlotta. What would you talk about to all the Romans and citizens and great big intellectual brains assembled to give ear?"

"About fifteen minutes."

This was pretty good for Chester, who was not a born humorist.

"I know. But you'd have to have a subject. Even Chauncey M. Depew and Job Hedges have to have those things." He pretended not to hear and went on smoothing the lapels of his evening coat.

"What—besides fifteen minutes—were you going to talk about at the Golden Poppies?"

"Really in earnest?"

"Horribly."

"I've told you often enough—the Secret of Success."

"My word!"

"There you go again."

"I'm sorry, Chet. But do you mean to say you intended to stand up before all those people and give our snap away?"

"What snap, if you please?"

"How we came to make Angel Bloom—grandmother's recipe for rouge?"

"Who ever mentioned rouge? The trouble with most women is that they have to see everything in a personal light. Men—serious men—aren't interested in such matters."

"What would make the big intellectual brains sit up and clap their strong manly hands?"

Chester walked a pace away from his Flossie and stood regarding the frail skill with which she clasped a bracelet round her wrist.

"How would you go at the Secret of Suc-

cess?" she persisted, cocking her head to one side.

"Well, I'd dwell on character—the formation of character—how the struggles of youth against obstacles develop the qualities of leadership——"

"Some quotations from Tennyson and Marcus Aurelius?"

"Milton and Oliver Wendell Holmes," he corrected her.

"Then there's Abraham Lincoln and the pine-knot fire."

"See here, Floss," he broke out, "you must have been reading my notes."

"All your life," she smiled.

Then giving him a long and serious gaze she volunteered in a voice which was stranger than her look: "Great Scott!"

"Thinking you could do better, I suppose?"

"No, I wasn't thinking that. I—I was sort of thinking how I'd like to hear you make a speech—if you were anybody's husband but mine."

The Hector Macawbers, who were very rich beneficiaries of the perfumery trust, usually dined in splendor at home, the colonel moodily reflected as he sat beside Flossie in a taxicab that bumped them toward Bedlam.

"Aren't the Macawbers keeping house any more?" he asked with a sigh.

"We didn't come to New York to sit round a stuffy old plush house," she told him. "You know what the doctor ordered. Hector and I picked out Bedlam this afternoon over the telephone. It's noisy and low—full of brokendown actors and lovely wretches. We can dance our heads off."

"That'll be nice," agreed the danceless husband.

They found the Macawbers and their party-waiting for them in the noisy little lobby by the Bedlam's elevator. Young banditti in pinkish uniforms were busily robbing people of their coats and hats; the sign Evening Dress Obligatory was prominently hung over the cloakroom door, from which a profane stranger in a brown business suit was being ejected.

Mr. Hector Macawber was an overfed gentleman of fifty-five, whose slender waistline and bulging sides hinted that he wore corsets. Mrs. Macawber was a frilly person with silver slippers and snow-white hair. Phil Jason, also

of the perfumery trust, was a neatly groomed, close-cropped little man who suggested the commuting church member come to New York for a good time. As a matter of record he was born in lower Fifth Avenue, had been twice divorced, and the stout but still beautiful woman at his side was an ex-choir singer who had got her name in the papers as the third Mrs. Jason.

There was a clatter of welcome.

"What a fascinating, queer place. I am thrilled," protested Mrs. Macawber as they were going up in the elevator.

"Flossie just would come here. I suggested the Insomnia Roof and the Nightmare Gardens—but she insisted that Chester had to have excitement." Macawber winked over at Framm.

"I've been having the most awful time with him," confessed Flossie.

"What can you expect?" Old Macawber looked ever so wise. "Husband, New York—puff. He's off!"

"They're dreadful," sympathized Mrs. Jason in her languid contralto.

"Heck's going in for Bicardi rum this week," proclaimed Mrs. Macawber. "It makes

him very loud. What vice has yours taken up?"

This last was put to Florabel.

"Public speaking," announced Chester's little secret of eternal youth.

"Public speaking!" echoed the elevator.

"We have with us to-night Col. Chester A. Framm, citizen, patriot and man," spouted Jason. "Got the habit, I suppose, the night you sneezed your way into the Hall of Fame?"

"Shut up!" commanded Flossie.

Framm, who was blushing like a schoolboy, began to stutter, "It hasn't—come on yet. You see, my wife——"

"Proud of you?" wheezed Macawber. "Quite naturally. Who ever heard of a colonel who wasn't an orator?"

The old beau stood staring pop-eyed.

"What's the matter now? Going to have a fit right here between floors?" asked Jason in counterfeit alarm.

"An in-spi-ra-tion!"

He opened his mouth, displaying a suspiciously even row of teeth, and would have spoken further had not the door opened upon the African din of New York's most frantic nightmare dining room. The walls were done

in violent vegetable designs with restless monstrosities capering across the panels. Over the ceiling stretched an awning of wild stripes. More or less presentable young women in the costume of Pierrot strolled between the overflowing tables, passing small cards with the announcement:

A NIGHT IN LOVELAND

AND

FEAST OF AFTER-DINNER WISDOM

J FAWCETT TWEED
CELEBRATED RACONTEUR AND PRINCE OF
BOHEMIA AS

HOST OF THE EVENING
WELCOMES YOU ALL

Chester Framm had read the card twice before he looked over and saw the grin on Macawber's face.

CHAPTER XVII

A PALE GHOST AND A SOLID TRUTH

"By George, Chet," cried the merry old blade, "here's your chance! There's the speaker's table all set and ready for you."

Framm frowned at his wife, and heartened by her averted gaze he decided that the Macawber style of wit was poor and nothing more. The table to which he referred was a large one, elaborately set with a dozen places and standing on a raised dais at the end of the room.

"What's the idea?" he asked, again puzzling over the card as he took his seat at their own table.

"Abe Hannigan, who runs this place, got the notion that he could conduct a continuous banquet here every night. So he's hired a gang of professional banqueters to sit at the host's table and a broken-down spellbinder to act as host of honor. But I didn't know J. Fawcett Tweed had got this low," explained Jason, eying the empty head table.

"And who's this J. Fawcett Tweed?"

"You've lived away from Broadway," was Jason's commiserating hint.

"Tweed isn't the man he used to be, nor never was," cut in Macawber. "He was one of your ballyhoo lawyers with a silver tongue and a leaden brain until the state disbarred him for engineering a fake-condemnation proceedings in the Bronx. Then he decided to become a prince of good fellows—you know the type—recklessly generous with other people's wine."

"He was quite sought after for a while," chimed Mrs. Macawber.

"He is now-by the subpœna man."

"You remember him," said the Spiggoty to Chester—"He tried to butt in at your banquet."

"I hope you'll like my party," remarked old Hector to Mrs. Framm, but that lady's eyes were all for the head table.

There was something ghastly about that head table. It conveyed the same sense of sacrilege which religious rites, funerals or weddings often do in stage productions. Bright

with glassware and flowers—artificial flowers probably—the whole laden board awaited its mock revelers. The effect was depressing. The table had been set in such a way that the imitation guests could face their audience as they do in stage banquets. Broadway had never thought of anything more mawkish than this scene.

The band blared. Out of the nowhere those puppet guests came trooping—a miserable painted crew, as Framm could see from his not distant seat. Weirdly enameled women and queer feeble men—they sauntered self-consciously two by two and stood expectantly by their chairs. Then came a salvo from orchestral trumpets. A puffy little fellow with the face of a diseased mushroom stood at center plate and spread a mechanical smile. The appearance of J. Fawcett Tweed brought some applause, also catcalls.

"I thank you, fellow Bo-he-mi-ans," came a sonorous whisky-laden voice. "Let the revels begin."

The poorly paid revelers at the main table were seated accordingly, and Tweed was seen to turn his stupid, self-indulgent old smile toward the painted lady at his left. A stage

butler poured wine—it was easy to imagine that ginger ale gurgled from the tin-foiled neck of the bottle, and by Tweed's meager occasional sips one might quite safely say that such was the case.

"You don't mean to say he does it every evening for money?" Framm found himself asking, with both pity and marvel.

"Money and the drinks," grinned Macawber. "But Hannigan's foxy—J. Fawcett doesn't get a real drink until the party's over."

"He's never asked anywhere any more," came Mrs. Jason's rich contralto.

"He made a pretty fair speech back in 1910," explained Macawber.

"He never was any good," objected Jason. "I wonder who ever told him he could make a speech?"

These comments were distributed over several courses of food which was a degree better than Bohemian and several degrees worse than good. At the table of honor the imitation ladies and gentlemen were hanging on the words of J. Fawcett Tweed; now and then they would burst into a gale of laughter—a gale so nicely timed as to suggest the pressing of a button at proper intervals. Chester dur-

ing a break in his morbid contemplation found his Flossie whispering intimately with the captain of waiters, who wore a worldly smile and glanced now and then toward the host of honor.

"I'm getting his biography," she explained when her husband caught her eye. "It seems he is just playing here for the week. Last week they had a Hindu juggler, and next to come will be a troupe of trained dogs. The waiter says that the people like the dogs best."

"Heck, why did you choose this dreary place?" asked Mrs. Heck by way of wholesome cheer.

"Ask Flossie," he defended weakly. "She's brought Chet to study—and of course he's got to make his usual appearance to-night."

"You just let my Goober alone!" demanded Flossie; and her tone wasn't all banter.

"Come on—give us an oration—be a good chap!" Jason put in his oar.

"My wife won't let me," protested the blushing slave of ambition.

"Go ahead," said Flossie kindly. "It's so noisy here I'm sure nobody ever listens to anybody."

The sharp woody tat-tat of a gavel punctu-

ated Bedlam. The band blared, the drums ruffled. Right and left little hissing sounds besought silence; for J. Fawcett Tweed was standing by his chair on the dais. Leaning slightly forward, his fat fingers braced against the tablecloth, his swollen old face distributed its lifeless smile right and left.

"Dear brothers and sisters in Loveland—or shall I say—true affinities in the Land of Love and Laughter?

"We welcome you here in the name of the divine electric spark which leaps from breast to breast in that chosen realm where responsibility is unknown, where care is as nought and joy is unconfined."

"Poor wretch!" insisted Mrs. Macawber, who apparently was one of your rich women who love to indulge in pity.

"In Bo-he-mi-a," thus the husky voice rolled it forth like the blast from a distillery, "there is no such word as slave. We are all kings and—pardon me, ladies—queens together. Here the millionaire hobnobs with the clerk, poverty sits cheek by jowl with riches. There is no gold here"—he turned to frown at a waiter who was quarreling over his tip—"no gold here, save the true gold of mind and

heart. Here, amid the bubble of wine and the laughter of bright eyes, we may pledge the toast"—ecstatically lifting a hollow-stemmed glass of ginger ale: "Here's to me, as bad as I am, and to you, as good as you are. For as bad as I am and as good as you are I'm as good as you are as bad as I am."

"Phew!" whispered Jason. "That joke was chloroformed when I was a freshman."

"1891," agreed Macawber.

"As bright as I am as punk as he is," paraphrased Jason. "I'm glad Flossie insisted on our coming."

Col. Chester A. Framm, however, was only aware of the applause which followed the after-dinner bathos. He was ashamed of the envious thrill along his spine.

"In the flower-laden court of Bo-he-mi-a," the prince of good fellows went rolling on, "all men are poets, for who so dull as not to sing when the rarest flowers of thought are strewn with a prodigal hand——"

"Get the hook!"

This comment, which the colonel rather resented, came from a rat-faced little fellow who sat beside a milk-white blonde at the table just behind him. The blonde replied: "Shut up!

He ain't an amachewer." Which raised her in the colonel's regard.

His wistful eyes were again on the professional speaker, and when he turned and looked over at his wife he caught her studying him with the amused affectionate expression she often held for him. He turned sullenly away. Awful example of misspent ambition that this Tweed might be-and Framm had no intention of trading lives with him—vet he possessed the thing which Framm had always wanted to cultivate in himself-stage presence. What though his phrases were empty as sucked eggs, his condition a mockery among his fellow men? In spite of that he could stand alone, the observed of an audience; and in the last analysis their jeers were drowned in the general applause.

Every evening he could feel that ego-satisfaction which Chester A. Framm had known but once—on that mad, glad prize-winning night when Carlotta Beam had shown him the first step on the road to greatness.

He got another glimpse of Flossie. She was taking in the speaker's table with all the sarcastic brilliance of her eyes.

The colonel was brought back to his sur-

roundings suddenly, shockingly, as by a dash of cold water. Somebody was shouting his name through the room:

"Col. Chester A. Framm!"

That horrifically personal address was being roared from the speaker's table; moreover it was J. Fawcett Tweed who was roaring it, his shapeless mouth wide open, his fat right hand generously extended.

"—and again I repeat that name, Col. Chester A. Framm, a name which is doubly well-equipped boudoir blessed in every throughout the length and breadth of the land. Let us hail the Cosmetic King! Need I say that we are proud to have him with us tonight? And yet it is not unusual in the court of Bo-he-mi-a for princes of commerce to come and make merry with struggling poets and—and workers in the busy marts of trade; for in the realm of flowers is not the primrose the equal of the American Beauty? is an unusual treat which we all have in store -to hear a few remarks from the American Beauty—" It was not till now that full realization of his danger came upon Chester Framm. His tongue seemed to have turned to chalk.

"—the American Beauty who has done more to perpetuate American beauty—I mean the ladies, God bless 'em—than any other citizen of our great republic. Beauty, they say, is only skin deep; yet by the skin we are able to tell a peach from a potato. But let not my own poor words detain you all from a feast of good things. Ladies and gentlemen, Col. Chester A. Framm will honor us with a few words on—"

He paused and seemed to consult his notes.

"——on The Secret of Success."

The room grew black before Framm's eyes. In the haze Macawber's face seemed to have grown purple and Mrs. Macawber's to have taken on her favorite look of plutocratic pity. He tried to shoot an angry glance at Flossie, but the muscles of his face were out of order.

"Get up, you goose!" he heard her commanding.

He staggered to his feet amidst an avalanche of hand-clapping and an earthquake of bang-banging sounds—the latter being produced by means of little wooden spoons which the management had provided as ready noise makers. All the world was looking at him with the same vacant stare—he now knew how the

mob must look to the man inside the noose. From the head table the impossible Mr. Tweed smirked like some cruel idol. Framm stood a tortured moment before he performed his supreme act of self-sacrifice.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said quietly, "I am no talker. But I thank you nevertheless."

And he sat down.

It was brief, inglorious and surprising even to Chester. But what immediately followed was in the realm of miracles. For the heavy contact with his chair seemed to have touched some synchronic spring across the table, a spring which caused a little woman to leap to her feet, snapping quick golden fires from her eyes as she challenged the whole room.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he heard Flossie's chirping, clear, rather nasal challenge. "I'm Mrs. Framm. There's a speech that's been bottled up in this family for about sixteen years, and because my husband has been too busy with real work to fool with dissipation that bottle's never been opened. I will now proceed to uncork it. The label on that speech, I believe, is The Secret of Success. Well, here goes.

"I don't know anything about great big

grand successes like Napoleon. The only work of genius I've ever had a chance to watch is my Chester building up the cosmetic business. If you want to hear about him—"

Cries of "Hear! Hear!"

"Well, now, friends, this is his secret of success. He's got there by three things: Finding something the people wanted, giving it to them, and keeping his mouth shut. Chester never advertises himself; he lets other fellows do it for him. Did you ever notice that the fellow who blows the horn never conducts the orchestra? That's Chester's philosophy. There may be something fine about being a great oratorical statesman, like Noah Webster. I don't know, because I never read history books. But what I do know is this: My Chester is just as big a hit as I want, and just the kind of hit I'm looking for. Sixteen years ago he started in by trying to interest a corner druggist in a dozen jars of homemade rouge. This week the shipments of Framm's Complexion Preparations throughout the United States, Great Britain and the Colonies, if carried in a single train of box cars would extend twice round Manhattan

Island and stick the end of its tail out beyond Yonkers.

"If Chester's got to be bragged about I'm the one that should do it, because I'm his wife. At the age of twenty-three he started in to be a great statesman and fizzled out after one performance. At the age of forty-one he's lost the power of speech, but he's the man who puts complexion cream on the face of the globe. And that's the secret of success—if you know what I mean. I'd rather be boss in a glue works than a cockroach in the Hall of Fame. The thing to do is to find out what you're good at, then do it; and if you can't find out for yourself find somebody who can."

She sat down in the hush before the cloud-burst. Mr. Hannigan was the only complainant that night because, as he told the head waiter: "Enthusiasm's fine for the place—but who pays for the breakage?" The Macawber table became the focal point for one of those distressingly cordial affairs known as getting acquainted with New York. They would have borne Flossie triumphantly on their shoulders had they dared and had not Colonel Framm, now master of his dignity, prevented.

As a matter of fact Chester would have ap-

proved had not his egotism smarted with one of those vanity wounds which an actor feels when he finds that his poor little wife is becoming billed as a prima donna. The formalities ceased in a general clatter during which Mr. Hannigan saw to it that breakage was made golden for him in extra wine orders. The jazz began its harmonic convulsions, the floor cleared for dancing.

"I'm crazy to jazz!" cried Flossie, and almost on the confession found herself whirling away against the broad shirt front of Hector Macawber. Her husband, still deep in his coma, sat facing a newly opened bottle of wine.

"Ah, Colonel Framm!"

A champagne-thickened, fusil-oily voice spoke close to his shoulder. Looking round Framm descried the bulbous face of the host of honor.

"Mr. Tweed? How do you do."

The colonel found himself pump handling the pretentious hand of the pretentious little fellow. Tweed's air had changed from one of lofty inspiration to one of cringing servility.

"It's a great honor to us," he insisted, quite ignoring the passion with which so recently

he had eulogized Bohemia's democratic tendencies. "A great honor to have one of your—er—importance in our midst. It gives tone to the place." His eyes were wandering toward the champagne bottle. "I have often thought it would be a good plan to organize a little club restaurant where the better classes—our sort of people, you know—could forgather and exchange ideas."

"Upper-class Bohemia?" asked the colonel with a sarcasm unusual to him.

"Exactly." The small watery eyes were now resting so lovingly upon the bottle that Framm could not unheed the hint.

"Waiter, bring a glass for Mr. Tweed."

The waiter, who was a magician, produced a glass out of nowhere, and the orator scarcely lingering to wish the colonel's very good health drained it at a gulp.

"Excellent!" He smacked his thick lips. "You never can tell about a wine—"

"Until it's uncorked?"

"A splendid idea! I hope you'll let me use it in one of my speeches. It will be especially appreciated as one of Colonel Framm's epigrams."

Framm grunted his consent. He wished

the man would let him alone, but he lingered to help himself to a second glass.

"Ah! And, colonel, I wish particularly to congratulate you on your charming and—ah—brilliant wife. A splendid speech! A telling speech! She goes in for that sort of thing, perhaps?"

"About once in a lifetime," the colonel conceded.

"She should cultivate the talent—practice for the rostrum. Nothing can be gained without application. Public speaking is as much an art, I might say, as acting or portrait painting."

As he talked and drank he swelled back into his air of sublimity. Could it be possible that this ghastly wreck thought of himself as a success?

"I have no doubt."

"You should groom that little woman for a career—"

Framm was standing patiently waiting for the pest to finish his glass and go his way.

His head was beginning to ache and he hoped Flossie wouldn't dance all night.

"And—ah—colonel. Before you go would you mind my presenting you to Mrs. Tweed?

Come here, my dear. Mrs. Tweed, Colonel Framm. It is seldom we have an opportunity nowadays——"

A faded woman came forward out of the throng. So colorless was she that it was a full minute before Framm got the true significance of the apparition. Tall, thin, her whole look somehow terrible, the woman stood before him and calmly held out her hand. Her hair was iron gray, her eyes deep sunk, and she wore the same professional smirk as did her husband. And yet there was no doubt about it. It was Carlotta Beam.

"How—how do you do, Mrs. Tweed?" His hand was shaking in her cold and skinny clasp.

She made a stiff, peculiar curtsy. The sight of the dilapidated evening gown over her stringy, rather masculine frame, the glimpse he got of her badly tinted complexion made him want to laugh one of those tragic laughs which, like a consumptive cough, should bring the blood. Should he recognize her? Should he say to her pompous failure of a husband that this was Carlotta Beam, who had all but taken Chester's life into her strong hands to mold into her statue of true greatness? Mrs.

Tweed stood smirking, a faded, naughty, old-maidish smirk.

No sign of recognition. Apparently the cue was for silence.

"I was telling Colonel Framm that he ought to be proud of that little wife of his," Tweed was going glibly on. "She has the gift; perhaps not the art—but the gift."

"It was very nice," was Carlotta's cut-anddried comment. He was shocked to hear her voice, which had grown shrill and cracked.

"Ah. Just a second—only a second."

It was not made plain where Tweed was going, save toward a quarter of the room where free drinks were easier to obtain.

Only for a secretive point of time Chester Framm stood beside his early ideal, yet somewhere in her faded eyes he saw that vision which had glowed so purely in the days when they had sat under a live oak, a book between them.

"So you have come to this," she said in a tone which would have seemed patronizing had it not betrayed a strain of curious tenderness.

Framm merely said "Yes" and smiled. Which was to his credit; this was the woman

who in youth had boasted that she could make statesmen at will.

"Well, Carlotta—this is sudden!"

The music had stopped, and Flossie, detaching herself from old Hecor's arm, came smiling toward her long-lost rival.

"How do you do?" croaked Carlotta, gaunt and forbidding as some old raven.

"Of course you know you're talking to Mrs. Tweed?" Chester had put on his most jovial air.

"Yes, indeed. I saw you at the table of honor. It must be great to be in the public eye like that."

"Thank you. We were very much amused by your—your pretty little speech."

It was like a compliment delivered from the throne to a deserving milkmaid.

"I'm glad you thought it pretty. That's our business, you know—making people pretty."

Flossie never lost her smile, but she said it as though she would add: "And we could do a thing or two for you, my dear."

Mrs. Tweed excused herself and walked away toward the table where the Prince of Bohemia was buried deep in someone else's champagne. Floss had had the last telling word. Your best Prussians, after all, are women.

"Candy kid," said Col. Chester Framm late that night, addressing the silken bundle he was holding in his arms as their taxicab skidded homeward, "I really believe you requested that Tweed idiot to call on me for a speech."

"I really believe I did," she recollected, speaking into his fur collar.

"Why?"

"Old Nuisance! You had to begin your public career somewhere, now didn't you?"

"Had to stop it somewhere, you mean."

"You got so tragic about your blighted genius. So I thought I would lead you to a place where you could just uncork that old speech."

"I see. How did you know they made speeches at the Bedlam Restaurant?"

"Saw an ad in the paper. It said, 'Bedlam Restaurant—Night in Loveland—Anybody 'Allowed to Speak Five Minutes—Feast of Oratory—Amateurs Welcome!"

Chester Framm cringed, but she clang to him furrily, much as a squirrel clings to a tree in a high wind.

"Are you awful mad, papa?"

"No, angel cake. But tell me something more—how did you know Carlotta Beam had married that bad actor and would be at the party?"

"I just naturally find things out, Mister Brutal. That's my contribution to the firm."

And since this is a symphony in which the movements run rapidly over a long theme, let me tell you what happened to the Framms next day just as they were going out to lunch somewhere along the Broadway health resort. Junius McKoncle, president of the Golden Poppy Society, was announced, and when he came up he explained that he was going to California that very afternoon and had come to the Framms in haste and secrecy.

"To cut it short," said he, "state and national politics are in a mess. Last week I had a conference with Senator Wheeden and Governor Wilde, who were passing on toward Washington. Some one must be chosen who will do justice to the state and yet be in a position where he can say that he has made no enemies. We decided that you would be

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the man and they asked me to speak to you and coax you to consider the nomination."

"For what?" Chester's face was grim.

"Senator from California."

The silence emanating from the nomineeelect was long and embarrassing.

"Goob!" cried Floss in a moment of rapture, "don't you hear what they're offering you? Don't mind him, Mr. McKoncle. He accepts. Go catch your train."

"I decline."

It came rumbling like a voice from the tomb.

"But Colonel Framm!" McKoncle was quite shocked, that was sure.

"I don't think you realize the situation. If you accept I feel sure the state will be with you. A large majority of the people want—"

A. Framm, "and that is what a rotten senator I would make."

"Come here and kiss me," commented Floss, which brought a frivolous note into the convention and caused the California delegate to retire in disgust.

And when they were alone Chester said:

"You have to begin early with these things—the way you began with your complexion."

"What won-derful ideas you have, old Goob!" she confessed down his collar. "I began with my complexion the day I was born." "What?"

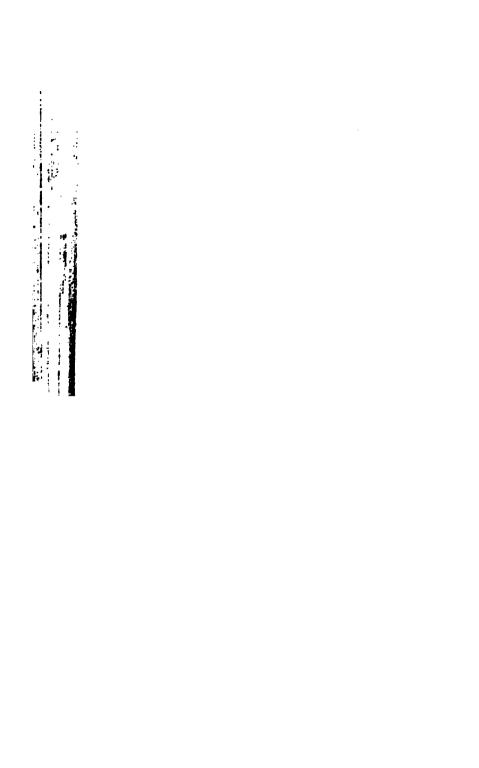
He held her away at arm's length and studied the famous coloring.

"How about Angel Bloom Cream?"

"Give it up," she smiled as becomingly as he could have wished. "I never tried it. What's the use of wasting it on me when there are forty squillion homely women willing to pay a dollar and a half a bottle?"

Which was a true word out of the mouth of the Framm Complexion Girl.

THE END



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